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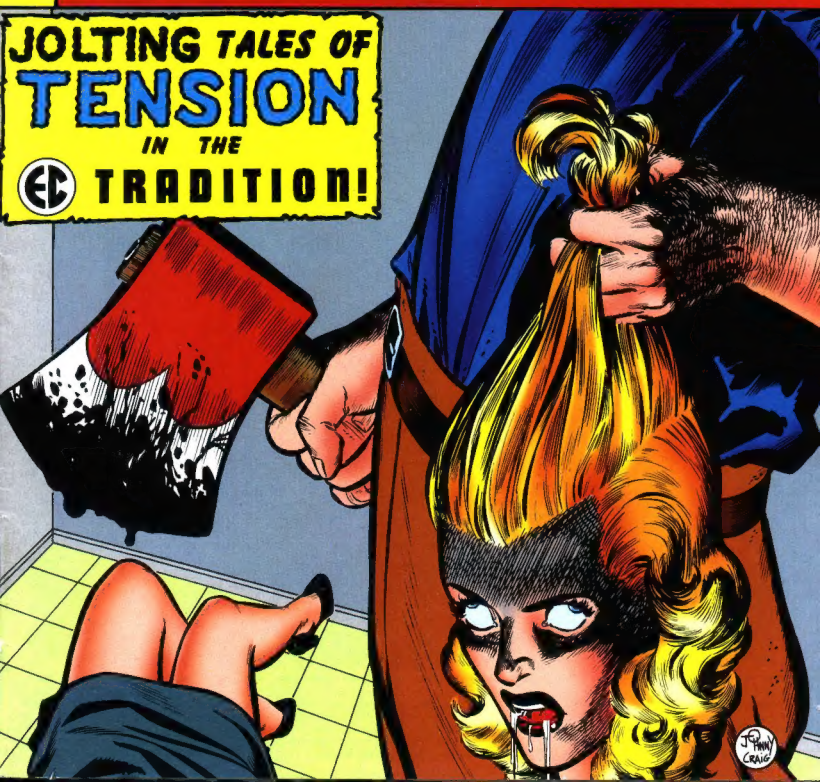

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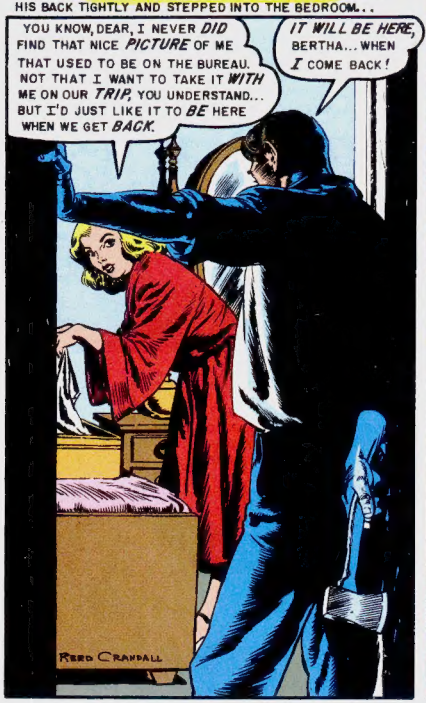
IN EACH AND EVERY PACKAGE

NORMAN MOVED THROUGH THE UPSTAIRS HALLWAY TOWARD THE BEDROOM. WHEN HE REACHED THE DOORWAY, HE STOPPED. HE STARED GRIMLY IN AT BERTHA, HIS WIFE. SHE WAS HUMMING SOFTLY AS SHE PACKED HER CLOTHES INTO THE OPEN SUITCASE ON THE BED. NORMAN SHUDDERED. THE TIME HAD COME. THE WEEKS OF HOPING AND PLANNING WERE ALMOST OVER NOW. SALLY WAS IN NEW YORK, WAITING FOR HIM. SHE'D FINISHED WITH HER PART OF THE SCHEME. NOW IT WAS UP TO NORMAN TO COMPLETE HIS. HE GRIPPED THE AXE HE HELD BEHIND HIS BACK TIGHTLY AND STEPPED INTO THE BEDROOM...


YOU KNOW, DEAR, I NEVER DID FIND THAT NICE PICTURE OF ME THAT USED TO BE ON THE BUREAU. NOT THAT I WANT TO TAKE IT WITH ME ON OUR TRIP, YOU UNDERSTAND... BUT I'D JUST LIKE IT TO BE HERE WHEN WE GET BACK.
IT WILL BE HERE, BERTHA... WHEN I COME BACK!
REED CRANDALL

BERTHA TURNED TO HER HUSBAND, SMILING...

YOU MADE A MISTAKE, DEAR. YOU MEANT WHEN WE COME BACK! YOU SAID...
I SAID, 'WHEN I COME BACK,' BERTHA! YOU'RE NOT COMING BACK! YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO NEW YORK!

BERTHA LOOKED AT HER HUSBAND AND SAW THE ANGRY FIRE IN HIS EYES AND THE GRIM EXPRESSION AROUND HIS TIGHT-LIPPED MOUTH AND HER BLOOD RAN COLD AS NORMAN BROUGHT THE AXE FROM BEHIND HIS BACK...

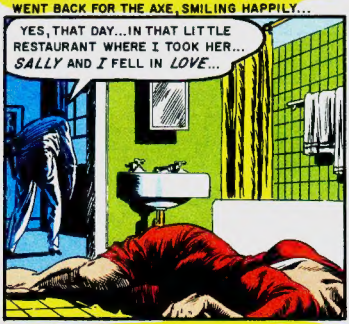
BERTHA BACKED OFF, WHIMPERING...
S--SALLY!
YES, MY DEAR...SALLY! SHE'S GOING TO TAKE YOUR PLACE. SHE'S WAITING FOR ME NOW.. IN NEW YORK...
I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND, NORMAN. HOW COULD SHE TAKE MY PLACE?
IT'S VERY SIMPLE, BERTHA. WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT NICE PORTRAIT OF YOU DISAPPEARED TO?
YOU...?
I TOOK IT...YES! I GAVE IT TO SALLY. SHE WENT TO NEW YORK... TO A PLASTIC SURGEON. HE OPERATED ON HER. HE MADE HER LOOK JUST LIKE YOU!
NORMAN GIGGLED IDIOTICALLY, ADVANCING TOWARD HER.
WHEN WE GET BACK FROM OUR VACATION, NO ONE WILL KNOW THE DIFFERENCE. THEY'LL COMMENT ON HOW WELL I LOOK AND HOW MUCH WEIGHT YOU'VE LOST. YOU SEE, SALLY ISN'T A FAT SLOB LIKE YOU. DO YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW I MET SALLY?
DON'T, NORMAN! PLEASE! HAVE PITY..
HE STOOD OVER BERTHA, GRINNING DOWN AT HER...
SALLY CAME INTO THE OFFICE LOOKING FOR WORK ONE DAY! I TOLD HER THERE WERE NO OPENINGS AND SHE STARTED TO CRY...
NORMAN! I...I BEG OF YOU...
NORMAN RAISED THE AXE...
THE POOR THING. SHE'D BEEN LIVING ON COFFEE AND DOUGHNUTS FOR WEEKS. SHE'D BEEN AN ACTRESS AND THE ROAD COMPANY SHE'D BEEN WITH HAD BEEN DISBANDED LEAVING HER STRANDED...
NORMAN! P-PLEASE...
...HIGH...HIGH OVER HIS HEAD, THE AXE HESITATED, WAVERING..
HER ACTING ABILITY, BERTHA! THAT'S WHAT'S GOING TO BE SO HELPFUL WHEN SHE TAKES YOUR PLACE. DO YOU KNOW SHE STUDIED YOUR VOICE FOR WEEKS. I MADE RECORDINGS...
NORM — ... OH, GOD!
2

BERTHA SQUEALED AS NORMAN BROUGHT THE AXE DOWN. THE SINGING OF STEEL AND THE THUD OF RAZOR-SHARP METAL AGAINST FLESH CUT THE SQUEAL SHORT...

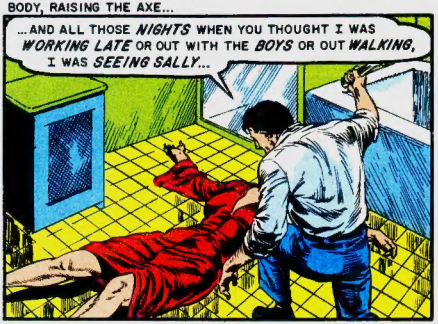
NORMAN LOOKED DOWN AT HIS WIFE LYING ON THE BEDROOM FLOOR WITH THE BLOOD OOZING FROM THE DEEP GASH HE'D OPENED UP IN HER SKULL...

HE RAISED THE AXE AGAIN, THEN LOOKED AT THE BLOOD DRIPPING ONTO THE SCATTER RUG. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD. HE PUT DOWN THE AXE, AND DRAGGED THE BODY INTO THE BATHROOM...

HE DROPPED THE BODY ON THE TILE FLOOR AND WENT BACK FOR THE AXE, SMILING HAPPILY...



HE RETURNED TO THE BATHROOM AND KNELT DOWN OVER THE BODY, RAISING THE AXE...



HE BROUGHT THE AXE DOWN SAVAGELY, AGAIN AND AGAIN...HACKING, SEVERING, DISMEMBERING...

HE STOOD UP AND WIPED THE PERSPIRATION FROM HIS BROW, SMEARING HIS FOREHEAD SCARLET...

HE STUMBLED DOWN THE STAIRS, MUTTERING...

MY *VACATION* WAS COMING UP. IT WOULD BE SO *SIMPLE*. *NEIGHBORS*...*RELATIVES*... *EVERYONE* WOULD THINK I'D *TAKEN YOU AWAY*...TO *NEW YORK*...

HE OPENED THE KITCHEN CABINET WHERE BERTHA ALWAYS KEPT THE BROWN WRAPPING PAPER...

...AND NO ONE WOULD EVER *SUSPECT* THAT I'D *DISMEMBERED* YOU AND *WRAPPED EACH SECTION UP CAREFULLY*...

HE BROUGHT THE WRAPPING PAPER BACK UPSTAIRS TO THE BATHROOM...

...AND *BURIED THEM IN THE BACK YARD!*

THEN, IN THE DARKNESS, NORMAN CARRIED OUT ONE CRUDE BLOODSTAINED BROWN PAPER PACKAGE AT A TIME AND DUG A SHALLOW HOLE IN THE BACKYARD...

SO *SALLY STUDIED YOUR VOICE* FROM *SECRET RECORDINGS* I MADE...

ONE AFTER THE OTHER, THROUGH THE NIGHT, HE BURIED THE GRISLY PARCELS AROUND THE YARD, PATTING BACK THE SOD SMOOTHLY...

SHE *WATCHED* YOU FROM *AFAR*...STUDIED YOUR *MANNERISMS*...YOUR *WALK*...YOUR *EVERY MOVEMENT*...

FINALLY, HIS PACKAGES INTERRED, HE CAREFULLY SCRUBBED THE BATHROOM CLEAN OF THE BLOOD STAINS...

AND *FINALLY, LAST MONTH*, I TOOK YOUR *PORTRAIT* FROM ITS PLACE ON THE BUREAU AND *GAVE* IT TO *SALLY* AND *SHE* WENT TO *NEW YORK*...TO A *PLASTIC SURGEON*...

...RETURNED THE AXE TO ITS PLACE IN THE CELLAR TOOL BOX...

LAST NIGHT SALLY *CALLED* ME. SHE SAID EVERYTHING WAS *READY*. THEY'D *REMOVED THE BANDAGES*. WE WERE *ALL SET*. SO...

...AND BURNED THE SCATTER RUG IN THE FURNACE...

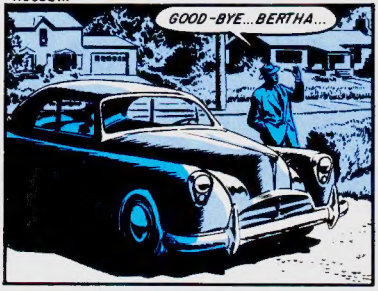
THEN HE PUT BERTHA'S SUITCASE INTO THE TRUNK OF THE CAR...

HE TOOK A FINAL TOUR THROUGH THE HOUSE, CHECKING...

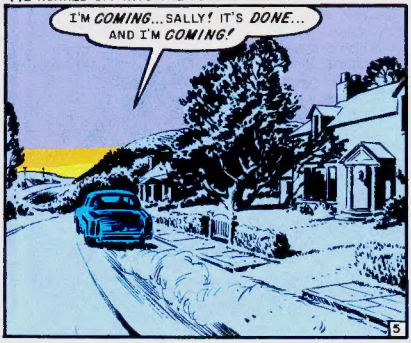
HE TURNED OUT ALL THE LIGHTS, LOCKED THE FRONT DOOR, AND EVEN REMEMBERED TO PLACE THE NOTE FOR THE MILKMAN THAT BERTHA HAD WRITTEN EARLIER INTO THE EMPTY BOTTLE ON THE BACK STEP...

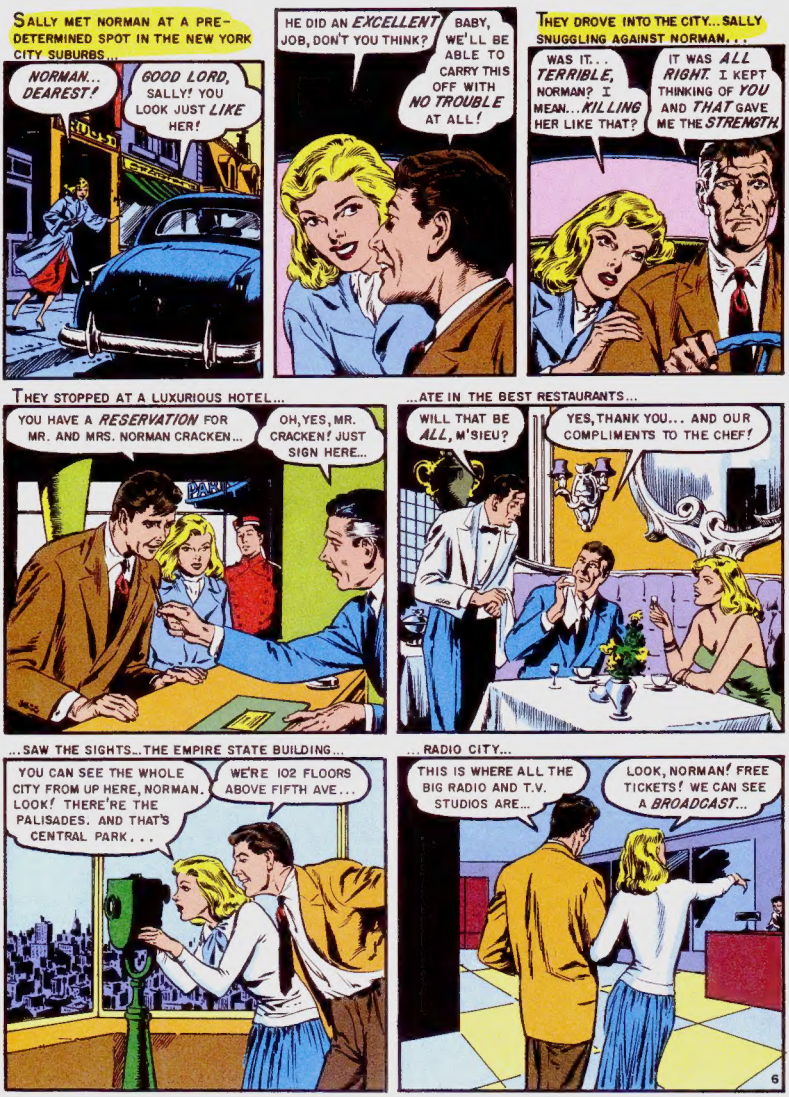
HE OPENED THE GARAGE DOORS AND SLID ONTO THE SEAT BESIDE THE DEPARTMENT STORE MANNEKIN HE'D DRESSED IN BERTHA'S CLOTHES...

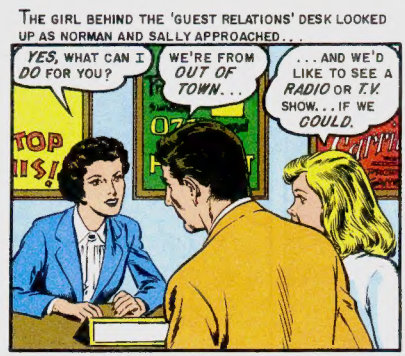
HE BACKED THE CAR OUT OF THE GARAGE, STOPPED, GOT OUT, AND CLOSED THE GARAGE DOORS, LOCKING THEM. HE TOOK ONE LAST LOOK AT THE EMPTY DARK HOUSE...



HE ROARED OFF INTO THE COMING DAWN...




SALLY MET NORMAN AT A PRE-DETERMINED SPOT IN THE NEW YORK CITY SUBURBS...
NORMAN... DEAREST!
GOOD LORD, SALLY! YOU LOOK JUST LIKE HER!
HE DID AN EXCELLENT JOB, DON'T YOU THINK?
BABY, WE'LL BE ABLE TO CARRY THIS OFF WITH NO TROUBLE AT ALL!
THEY DROVE INTO THE CITY... SALLY SNUGGLING AGAINST NORMAN...
WAS IT... TERRIBLE, NORMAN? I MEAN... KILLING HER LIKE THAT?
IT WAS ALL RIGHT. I KEPT THINKING OF YOU AND THAT GAVE ME THE STRENGTH.
THEY STOPPED AT A LUXURIOUS HOTEL...
YOU HAVE A RESERVATION FOR MR. AND MRS. NORMAN CRACKEN...
OH, YES, MR. CRACKEN! JUST SIGN HERE...
...ATE IN THE BEST RESTAURANTS...
WILL THAT BE ALL, M'SIEU?
YES, THANK YOU... AND OUR COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF!
...SAW THE SIGHTS... THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING...
YOU CAN SEE THE WHOLE CITY FROM UP HERE, NORMAN. LOOK! THERE'RE THE PALISADES. AND THAT'S CENTRAL PARK...
WE'RE 102 FLOORS ABOVE FIFTH AVE...
...RADIO CITY...
THIS IS WHERE ALL THE BIG RADIO AND T.V. STUDIOS ARE...
LOOK, NORMAN! FREE TICKETS! WE CAN SEE A BROADCAST...


THE GIRL BEHIND THE 'GUEST RELATIONS' DESK LOOKED UP AS NORMAN AND SALLY APPROACHED...
YES, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
WE'RE FROM OUT OF TOWN...
...AND WE'D LIKE TO SEE A RADIO OR T.V. SHOW...IF WE COULD.

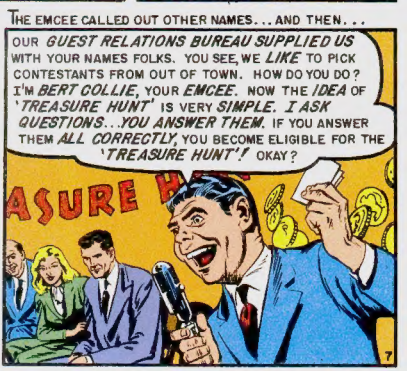
OF COURSE! YOUR NAME, PLEASE... AND ADDRESS...
ER...MR. AND MRS. NORMAN CRACKEN, 205 PINE STREET, LITTLE FALLS, OHIO.

THE GIRL HANDED NORMAN TWO TICKETS...
HERE YOU ARE, MR. AND MRS. CRACKEN. AND HAVE A PLEASANT STAY IN NEW YORK.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

WHAT SHOW ARE THEY FOR, NORMAN?
IT'S A PREMIER OF A NEW SHOW... A QUIZ SHOW CALLED 'TREASURE HUNT!' TONIGHT... AT 8:30!

OH, GOOD! MAYBE WE'LL GET ON IT AND WIN SOME MONEY!
OH, FORGET ABOUT THAT! ONLY FRIENDS OF THE SPONSORS OR THE EMCEES GET ON THOSE SHOWS...

THAT NIGHT, AT 8:15 NORMAN AND SALLY ARRIVED AT THE STUDIO AND TOOK THEIR SEATS...
OKAY FOLKS! WE'VE GOT FIFTEEN MINUTES TILL AIR TIME, SO WE'D LIKE TO PICK OUT OUR CONTESTANTS. WILL MR. AND MRS. ER...CRAKER... OR CRAKEN...PLEASE STEP UP...
NORMAN! THAT'S US!
REASURE HUNT


THE EMCEE CALLED OUT OTHER NAMES...AND THEN...
OUR GUEST RELATIONS BUREAU SUPPLIED US WITH YOUR NAMES FOLKS. YOU SEE, WE LIKE TO PICK CONTESTANTS FROM OUT OF TOWN. HOW DO YOU DO? I'M BERT COLLIE, YOUR EMCEE. NOW THE IDEA OF 'TREASURE HUNT' IS VERY SIMPLE. I ASK QUESTIONS...YOU ANSWER THEM. IF YOU ANSWER THEM ALL CORRECTLY, YOU BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR THE 'TREASURE HUNT'! OKAY?
ASURE H
7

BEFORE NORMAN AND SALLY REALIZED IT, THE PROGRAM WAS ON THE AIR, AND THE FIRST CONTESTANTS WERE STANDING BEFORE THE MICROPHONE...

OH, I'M *SORRY*, FOLKS! THAT'S THE *WRONG ANSWER!* BUT, FOR *APPEARING* ON *'TREASURE HUNT'* WE PRESENT YOU WITH...

STEP UP, MR. AND MRS. CRAKEN... YOU'RE NEXT!

AND NOW NORMAN AND SALLY WERE STANDING THERE... ANSWERING QUESTIONS...

CORRECT! AND *NOW*... FOR THE *'TREASURE HUNT'* QUESTION! *LISTEN*, BECAUSE WE WILL ALLOW *ONE ANSWER* AND *ONE ANSWER ONLY*...

WHAT WERE THE NAMES OF *COLUMBUS'S THREE SHIPS?*

OH...ER... THE *SANTA MARIA*...

THE *NINA*... AND THE *PINTA!*

CORRECT! ABSOLUTELY CORRECT! MR. AND MRS. CRAKEN! YOU HAVE *ANSWERED* THE *'TREASURE HUNT'* QUESTION *CORRECTLY* AND YOU ARE *NOW ELIGIBLE* TO *START YOUR TREASURE HUNT!* LULU, HOW MUCH IS THE TREASURE *WORTH...?*

THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS, BERT!

OH, DEAR...

D'YA *HEAR* THAT, FOLKS? *THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS! THAT'S* WHAT *YOUR TREASURE* IS *WORTH!* AND NOW, DO YOU WANT TO KNOW *WHERE* YOUR TREASURE *IS?* WELL, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS GO *BACK TO*... LET'S SEE... *LITTLE FALLS, OHIO,* AND *DIG IT UP*...

...BECAUSE *RIGHT AT THIS VERY MOMENT,* A *FIELD TEAM* FROM *THIS PROGRAM* IS *BURYING* YOUR TREASURE IN *YOUR OWN BACK YARD!* THREE...THOUSAND...DOLLARS...

NORMAN FELT HIS BLOOD RUN COLD. SALLY PALED TO ASHEN WHITE EXCEPT AROUND THE BRUISES REMAINING FROM HER PLASTIC SURGERY OPERATION. THEY LOOKED AT EACH OTHER...

S'MATTER, FOLKS? AREN'T YOU *HAPPY?* RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT, THEY'RE *BURYIN' THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS* IN YOUR *BACKYARD.* YOU SHOULD BE *HAPPY!*

CHOKE...

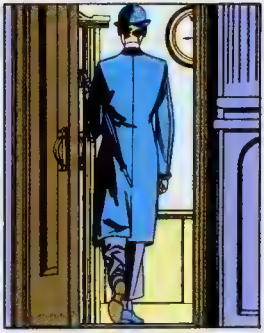
GASP...

THEY LOOKED AROUND. THERE WAS *NO* PLACE TO *RUN. NO* PLACE TO *HIDE.* AND *THEN, SOMEWHERE BACKSTAGE, A TELEPHONE BEGAN TO RING...*

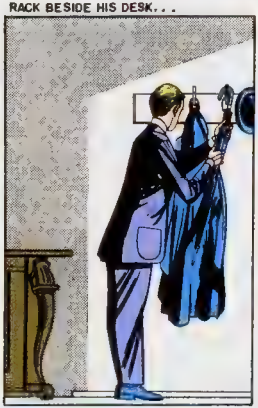
—THE END—

MONOTONY

EXACTLY AS HE HAD DONE EVERY MORNING FOR THE PAST FOURTEEN YEARS, MILTON GANS SIGHED, PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR TO THE BANK EMPLOYEES ENTRANCE, NOTED THAT, AS ALWAYS, IT WAS PRECISELY TWO MINUTES TO NINE ON THE COLD-FACE WALL-CLOCK...

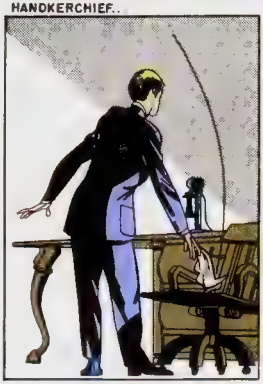


...STRODE TO HIS LITTLE CUBICLE BEHIND THE RAILING, HUNG UP HIS HAT, COAT, AND UMBRELLA ON THE RACK BESIDE HIS DESK...

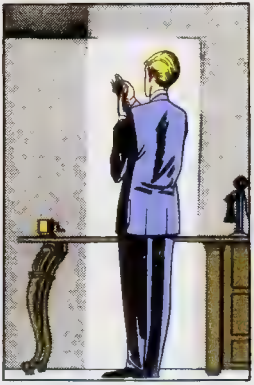


...TORE OFF THE PREVIOUS DAY'S PAGE FROM HIS DESK CALENDAR...

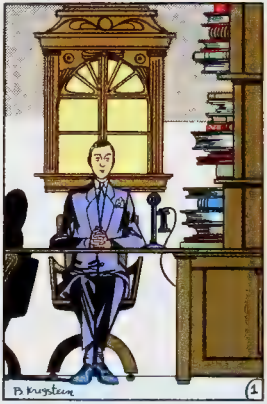
...DUSTED OFF THE WELL-WORN SWIVEL CHAIR WITH HIS IMMACULATE HANDKERCHIEF..



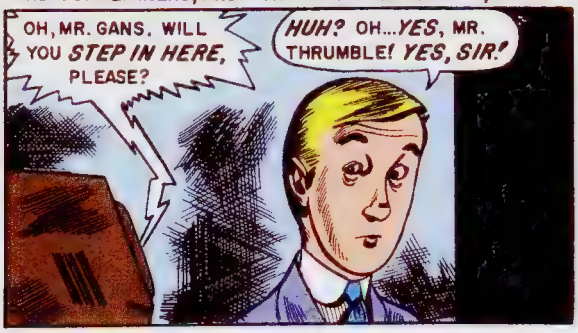
...SHARPENED HIS TRAY FULL OF PENCILS TO NEEDLE POINTS...



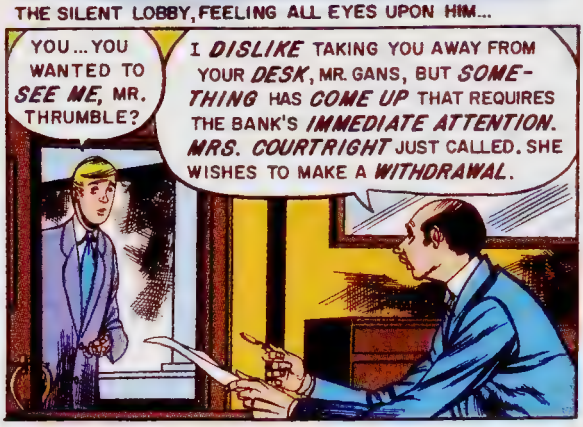
...AND SAT DOWN...



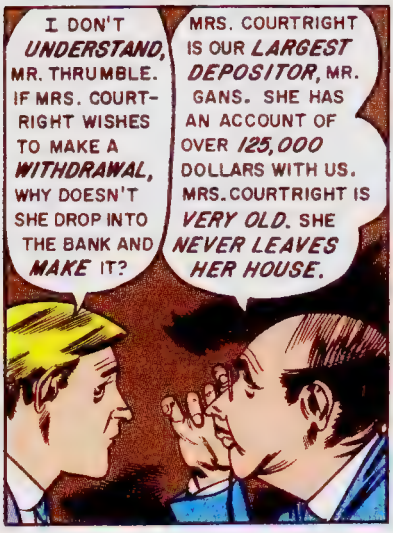
YES, THIS WAS THE RITUAL. EVERY DAY FOR THE PAST FOURTEEN YEARS, MILTON HAD PERFORMED IT. NOW HE SAT STIFFLY, WAITING FOR THE WALL CLOCK TO CHIME, WAITING FOR GRIM-FACED OLD CHARLIE, THE VENERABLE BANK GUARD, TO SHUFFLE ACROSS THE BANK LOBBY AND UNLOCK THE MASSIVE BRONZE DOORS, OPENING THE FLOODGATES TO THE HOARDS OF FORM FILLER-OUTERS, AND COMPLAINERS, AND MORTGAGE-DELINQUENTS, AND...

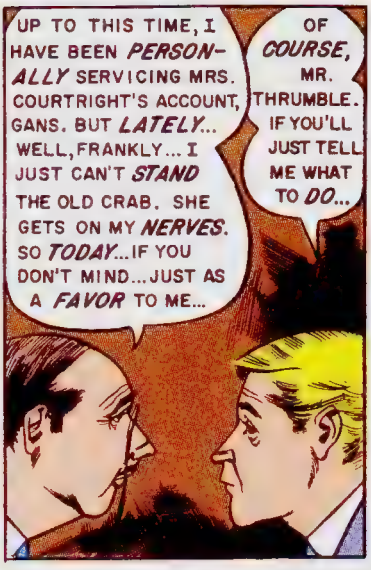


WHAT WAS THIS? SOMETHING NEW? SOMETHING STRANGE? SOMETHING DIFFERENT? SOME UNFAMILIAR ACTION EXPLODING THE MONOTONY THAT MILTON HAD GROWN TO HATE? MILTON AROSE NERVOUSLY AND TIP-TOED ACROSS THE SILENT LOBBY, FEELING ALL EYES UPON HIM...

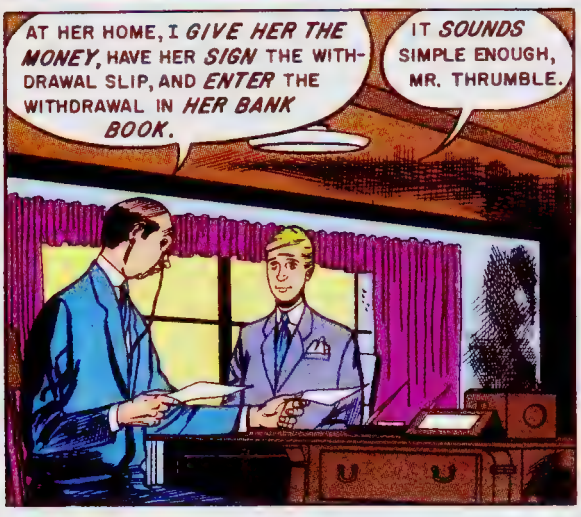

YOU...YOU WANTED TO *SEE ME,* MR. THRUMBLE?
I *DISLIKE* TAKING YOU AWAY FROM YOUR *DESK,* MR. GANS, BUT *SOMETHING* HAS *COME UP* THAT REQUIRES THE BANK'S *IMMEDIATE ATTENTION. MRS. COURTRIGHT* JUST CALLED. SHE WISHES TO MAKE A *WITHDRAWAL.*

MILTON SHRUGGED...


I DON'T *UNDERSTAND,* MR. THRUMBLE. IF MRS. COURTRIGHT WISHES TO MAKE A *WITHDRAWAL,* WHY DOESN'T SHE DROP INTO THE BANK AND *MAKE* IT?
MRS. COURTRIGHT IS OUR *LARGEST DEPOSITOR,* MR. GANS. SHE HAS AN ACCOUNT OF OVER *125,000* DOLLARS WITH US. MRS. COURTRIGHT IS *VERY OLD.* SHE *NEVER LEAVES HER HOUSE.*


UP TO THIS TIME, I HAVE BEEN *PERSONALLY* SERVICING MRS. COURTRIGHT'S ACCOUNT, GANS. BUT *LATELY...* WELL, FRANKLY... I JUST CAN'T *STAND* THE OLD CRAB. SHE GETS ON MY *NERVES.* SO *TODAY...* IF YOU DON'T MIND... JUST AS A *FAVOR* TO ME...
OF COURSE, MR. THRUMBLE. IF YOU'LL JUST TELL ME WHAT TO *DO...*

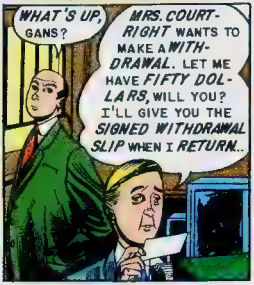
EVERY WEEK OR SO, THE OLD BAT CALLS IN AND WANTS TO MAKE A WITHDRAWAL FOR *FORTY* OR *FIFTY* DOLLARS... ENOUGH FOR *GROCERIES,* I GUESS. ALL I DO IS REMOVE HER *RECORD CARD* FROM THE FILE, *ENTER* THE *WITHDRAWAL,* FILL OUT A *WITHDRAWAL SLIP* AND *TAKE IT...* TOGETHER WITH THE *MONEY...* TO HER *HOME.*


AT HER HOME, I *GIVE HER THE MONEY,* HAVE HER *SIGN* THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP, AND *ENTER* THE WITHDRAWAL IN *HER BANK BOOK.*
IT *SOUNDS* SIMPLE ENOUGH, MR. THRUMBLE.

IT *IS,* GANS! EVERYTHING WOULD BE *VERY PAINLESS* IF IT WEREN'T FOR *MRS. COURTRIGHT.* I...I...*OH, WELL! YOU'LL SEE* FOR *YOURSELF!* HERE'S HER *ACCOUNT NUMBER*... SHE WANTS *FIFTY DOLLARS* THIS WEEK... AND HERE'S HER *ADDRESS*... AND... *GOOD LUCK!*
THANK YOU, MR. THRUMBLE.

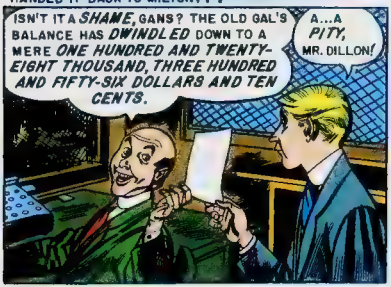
MILTON CLOSED THE DOOR TO MR. THRUMBLE'S OFFICE BEHIND HIM AND SURVEYED THE BUSTLING BANK LOBBY. A LINE HAD ALREADY FORMED AT THE GATE BEHIND WHICH HIS AND MISS CREEGAN'S DESKS STOOD. MISS CREEGAN LOOKED UP AT HIM. SHE WAS VERY ANNOYED...

MISS CREEGAN GLARED AFTER HIM AS MILTON STEPPED BEHIND THE TELLER'S CAGES AND SLID OUT THE FILE DRAWER CONTAINING MRS. COURTRIGHT'S ACCOUNT CARD...

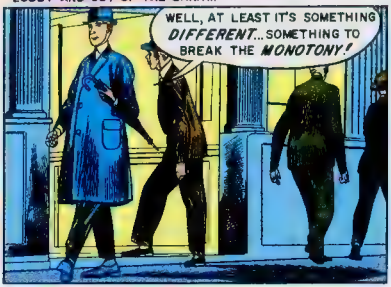

WHAT'S UP, GANS?
MRS. COURTRIGHT WANTS TO MAKE A WITHDRAWAL. LET ME HAVE FIFTY DOLLARS, WILL YOU? I'LL GIVE YOU THE SIGNED WITHDRAWAL SLIP WHEN I RETURN...

THE TELLER COUNTED OUT FIVE TEN DOLLAR BILLS..

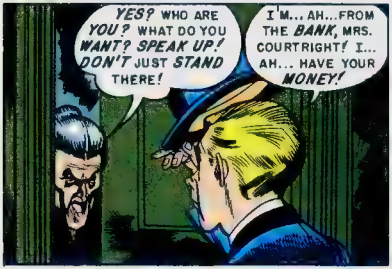
MR. DILLON PLACED MRS COURTRIGHT'S CARD IN THE MACHINE, PUSHED STUDS, FLICKED A LEVER, AND HANDED IT BACK TO MILTON...


ISN'T IT A SHAME, GANS? THE OLD GAL'S BALANCE HAS DWINDLED DOWN TO A MERE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHT THOUSAND, THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIX DOLLARS AND TEN CENTS.
A...A PITY, MR. DILLON!

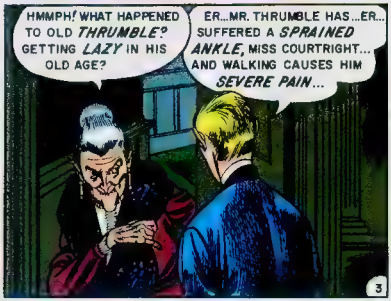
MILTON RETURNED TO HIS CUBICLE, PUT ON HIS HAT AND COAT, TOOK HIS UMBRELLA, AND STRODE ACROSS THE LOBBY AND OUT OF THE BANK...



MRS. COURTRIGHT'S HOUSE WAS ONE OF THOSE OLD BROWNSTONE HOUSES THAT HAD ONCE BEEN CONSIDERED VERY FASHIONABLE AND A SURE SIGN OF WEALTH. IN RECENT YEARS, MOST OF THEM HAD BEEN CONVERTED INTO DUPLEX APARTMENTS. MRS. COURTRIGHT HAD STUBBORNLY HELD ON TO HERS...



MRS. COURTRIGHT WAS A WRINKLED OLD THING WITH BEADY EYES AND A GRIM TIGHT-LIPPED MOUTH. SHE STUDIED MILTON FOR A MOMENT, LOOKING HIM OVER FROM HEAD TO TOE..


HMMPH! WHAT HAPPENED TO OLD THRUMBLE? GETTING LAZY IN HIS OLD AGE?
ER...MR. THRUMBLE HAS...ER... SUFFERED A SPRAINED ANKLE, MISS COURTRIGHT... AND WALKING CAUSES HIM SEVERE PAIN...

MRS. COURTRIGHT MOTIONED MILTON INTO THE LIBRARY...

BAH! DON'T LIE TO ME, YOUNG MAN. I KNOW WHY THRUMBLE DIDN'T COME! HE CAN'T STAND ME!

THAT IS NOT TRUE, MRS. COURTRIGHT! HE...

MRS. COURTRIGHT WRAPPED HER CANE ON THE FLOOR...

NEVER MIND! NEVER MIND! GIVE ME THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP... AND A PEN...

HERE YOU ARE, MRS. COURTRIGHT!

MRS. COURTRIGHT SCRAWLED HER NAME ACROSS THE DOTTED LINE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP AND HANDED IT BACK TO MILTON...

NOW...THE MONEY!

Y-YES, MA'AM! HERE YOU ARE!

MILTON TURNED TO GO. MRS. COURTRIGHT RAPPED HER CANE...

AREN'T YOU FORGETTING SOMETHING, YOUNG MAN? SIGN MY BANKBOOK!

OH! YES... I'M SORRY!

MILTON SUBTRACTED FIFTY DOLLARS FROM THE BALANCE IN MRS. COURTRIGHT'S BANKBOOK AND INITIALED THE RESULT. HE HANDED THE BOOK BACK TO THE OLD LADY...

THERE YOU ARE, MADAM! IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE TO SERVE YOU! GOOD-DAY!

HMMPH!

HE SMILED AT THE OLD LADY AND LEFT. ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE BANK, MILTON MUTTERED TO HIMSELF...

WHAT A PITY! ALL THAT MONEY WASTED ON SUCH AN OLD CROW. LORD, WHAT I COULDN'T DO WITH SOME OF THAT MOOLA...

THRUMBLE WAS WAITING FOR HIM WHEN HE RETURNED...

MRS. COURTRIGHT JUST CALLED, GANS! SHE TOLD ME SHE NEVER WANTS TO SEE MY UGLY OLD PUSS AGAIN. SHE WANTS THAT NICE YOUNG MAN TO COME EVERY WEEK FROM NOW ON!

OH, NO! NO!

THRUMBLE GRINNED...

SORRY, GANS! BUT MRS. COURTRIGHT IS THE BANK'S BIGGEST DEPOSITOR. SO WE MUST... HEH, HEH... PLEASE HER!

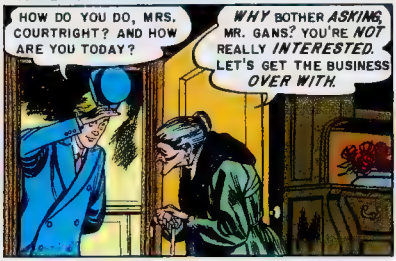
OF COURSE, MR. THRUMBLE. AS YOU SAY...

MILTON STEAMED AS MR. THRUMBLE CROSSED THE LOBBY, LAUGHING. HE TURNED TO MR. DILLON...

HERE! HERE'S YOUR ROTTEN WITHDRAWAL SLIP!

HEH, HEH! I SEE YOU GOT A PERMANENT JOB, GANS!

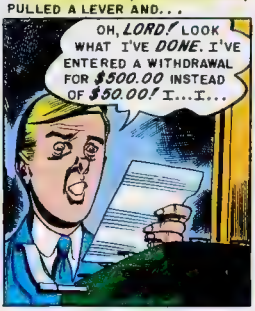
MONOTONY SET IN AGAIN. THE *SAME TEDIOUS MONOTONY*, FROM *THAT DAY ON*, WHENEVER MRS. COURTRIGHT *CALLED*, MILTON WOULD LEAVE HIS DESK, REMOVE HER ACCOUNT CARD FROM THE FILE, ENTER THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP, TAKE ENOUGH MONEY, AND GO TO HER HOUSE...


HOW DO YOU DO, MRS. COURTRIGHT? AND HOW ARE YOU TODAY?
WHY BOTHER *ASKING*, MR. GANS? YOU'RE *NOT* REALLY *INTERESTED*. LET'S GET THE BUSINESS *OVER WITH*.

AND EVERY TIME, MRS. COURTRIGHT WOULD SIGN THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP AND MILTON WOULD GIVE HER THE MONEY AND SIGN HER BANKBOOK, AND THEN...

ONE DAY, AFTER MRS. COURTRIGHT CALLED, MILTON REMOVED HER ACCOUNT CARD FROM THE FILE AND...

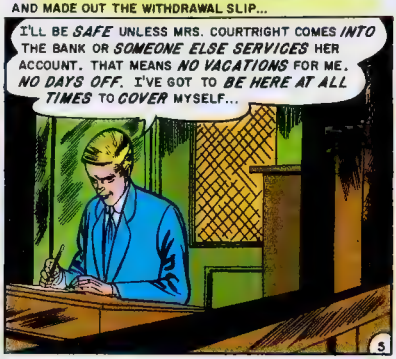
MILTON PLACED THE ACCOUNT CARD INTO THE MACHINE, PRESSED STUDS, PULLED A LEVER AND...



SUDDENLY MILTON SAW AN END TO ALL THIS MONOTONY. A WAY OUT. HE STARED AT THE HUGE BALANCE. THE $500 HAD MADE SUCH A *TINY* DENT...

MILTON GRINNED. IT WOULD BE SO SIMPLE. MRS. COURTRIGHT *NEVER* CHECKED TO SEE WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE *WITHDRAWAL SLIP*. ALL MILTON HAD TO DO WAS ENTER A *$50* WITHDRAWAL IN *HER* BANKBOOK, AND *POCKET* THE $450 DIFFERENCE. THE *ACCOUNT CARD* WOULD SHOW THE *$500* WITHDRAWAL. THE *SIGNED WITHDRAWAL SLIP* WOULD BE ITS *AUTHORIZATION*. AND MRS. COURTRIGHT WOULD *NEVER* KNOW. *HER RECORD* WOULD SHOW ONLY A *$50* WITHDRAWAL...

MILTON COUNTED OUT THE FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS AND MADE OUT THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP...


I'LL BE *SAFE* UNLESS MRS. COURTRIGHT COMES *INTO* THE BANK OR *SOMEONE ELSE SERVICES* HER ACCOUNT. THAT MEANS *NO VACATIONS* FOR ME. *NO DAYS OFF*. I'VE GOT TO *BE HERE AT ALL TIMES* TO *COVER* MYSELF...

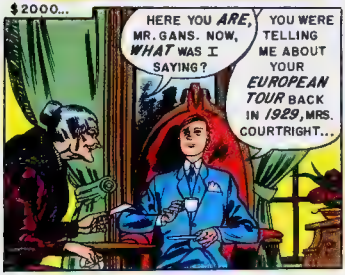
MILTON WAS AS NERVOUS AS A CAT WHEN HE WENT TO SEE MRS. COURTRIGHT. BUT SHE SIGNED THE WITHDRAWAL SLIP AS USUAL WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING AT IT...

THERE YOU ARE, MR. GANS. AND NOW THAT WE'VE FINISHED OUR BUSINESS, MAY I OFFER YOU A CUP OF TEA?
N-NO, THANK YOU, MRS. COURTRIGHT! I REALLY MUST RETURN TO THE BANK!

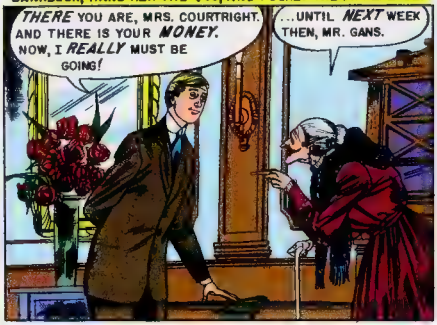
THAT NIGHT, MILTON ATE IN THE MOST EXPENSIVE RESTAURANT HE COULD FIND. AFTER THAT, HE WENT TO TWO NIGHT CLUBS. HE HAD A WONDERFUL TIME...

BUT $450 DOESN'T LAST VERY LONG ...ESPECIALLY THE WAY MILTON SPENT IT. BY THE FOLLOWING FRIDAY, IT WAS ALL GONE! AND SO, WHEN MRS. COURTRIGHT CALLED FOR HER $50...

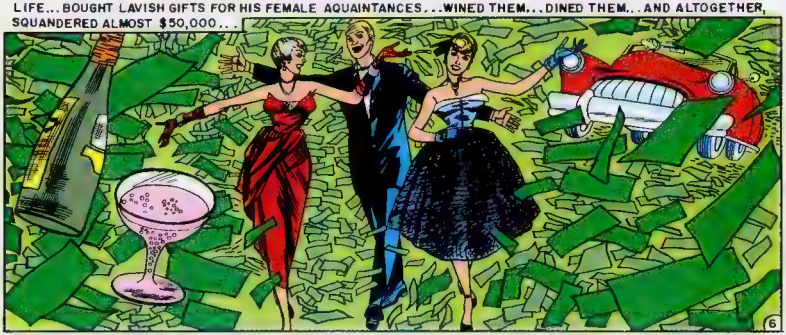
A YEAR PASSED. EACH WEEK, MILTON WOULD GO TO SEE MRS. COURTRIGHT. HE WOULD SIT AND TALK TO THE OLD BAT, AND SOMETIMES HAVE TEA WITH HER, AND HE'D GIVE HER A WITHDRAWAL SLIP TO SIGN... A WITHDRAWAL SLIP FOR $500...$1000... $2000...



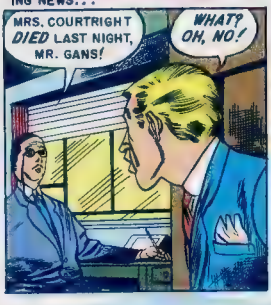
...AND THEN HE'D CALMLY ENTER A $50 WITHDRAWAL IN HER BANKBOOK, HAND HER THE $50, AND POCKET THE DIFFERENCE...



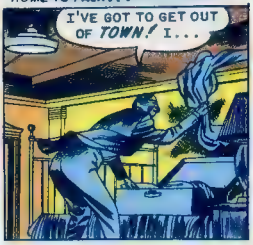
AND WITH THE MONEY HE'D PILFERED FROM OLD MRS. COURTRIGHT'S ACCOUNT, MILTON LED A WILD AND HECTIC LIFE... BOUGHT LAVISH GIFTS FOR HIS FEMALE AQUAINTANCES... WINED THEM... DINED THEM... AND ALTOGETHER, SQUANDERED ALMOST $50,000...



THEN IT HAPPENED. MR. THRUMBLE CALLED MILTON INTO HIS OFFICE ONE MORNING AND TOLD HIM THE HORRIFYING NEWS...

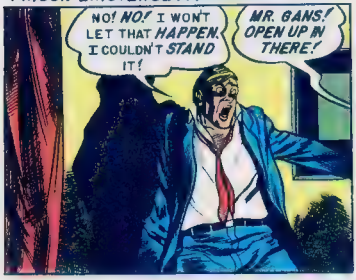


IT WAS *ALL OVER*. MILTON *KNEW* IT. AN *ACCOUNTING* OF MRS. COURTRIGHT'S *ESTATE* WOULD BE MADE AND THE *THEFTS* WOULD BE *DISCOVERED*. MILTON SLIPPED OUT OF THE BANK AND HURRIED HOME TO PACK...

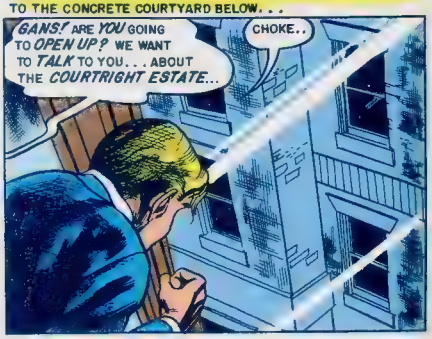


THERE WAS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR...

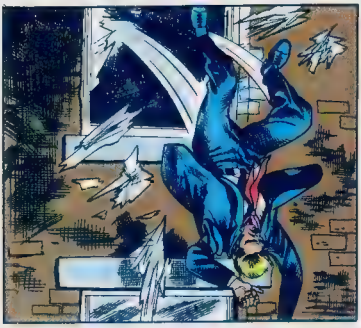
A *DETECTIVE*, NO DOUBT. THEY'D COME TO *ARREST* HIM. MILTON LOOKED AROUND WILDLY. IT MEANT *JAIL* FOR HIM... THE *HORRIBLE MONOTONY* BEGINNING AGAIN... A *HUM-DRUM PRISON EXISTENCE*...



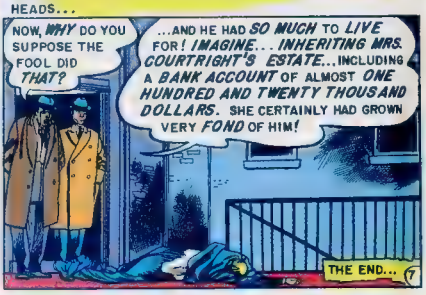
MILTON STEPPED TO THE WINDOW. IT WAS NINE STORIES DOWN TO THE CONCRETE COURTYARD BELOW...



MILTON JUMPED. HIS BODY DROPPED EARTHWARD LIKE A LIMP RAG...



...SMASHING INTO THE CONCRETE COURTYARD, SPLATTERING BLOOD, CRUSHING BONE, RIPPING AND TEARING FLESH. MR. THRUMBLE AND MRS. COURTRIGHT'S LAWYER CAME DOWNSTAIRS AND STOOD OVER MILTON'S CORPSE, SHAKING THEIR HEADS...


NOW, *WHY* DO YOU SUPPOSE THE FOOL DID *THAT?*
...AND HE HAD *SO MUCH* TO *LIVE* FOR! *IMAGINE*... *INHERITING* MRS. *COURTRIGHT'S ESTATE*...INCLUDING A *BANK ACCOUNT* OF ALMOST *ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS*. SHE CERTAINLY HAD GROWN VERY *FOND* OF HIM!
THE END...

CRIME-TIME

President and CEO—Stephen A. Geppi

Publisher—Russ Cochran

To "Crime-Time,"

CRIME 21. . .murder in the first degree. The story "In The Groove" by Jack Kamen, page 2 panel 5, who is Larry? The brother of Darryl and Darryl? Heh-heh!

In "Blood Brothers" page 2 panel 6 the caption reads "Alex guides the car down a palm-tree lined road", how does he drive the car from the passenger seat?

Now in your listing of the story titles and authors on the letters page and in the ad in "Previews" magazine you state that "Understudies!" follows the story "In The Groove", but in the actual comic they are reversed. Did these stories get reprinted out of sequence?

From: David (Melvin) Dellario Kensington, CT

Garry Larry Green (sung to the tune of "Circiciribin"). Alex guides by force of personality. In the original comic, "Groove" came first, but in the 64pg RCP reprint they reversed the order; we missed fixing it. Our anonymous (and is he glad!) editor is now a three-time loser!

Dear CRIME,

Re, issue #21: Donna in "Mother's Day" would have benefitted from a phone session with Dr. Laura Schlessinger. Although Dr. Laura would deplore Mr. Kingsley's abandoning the family, in the end, he's the only family member left alive.

In "Understudies!", I fail to understand why the old flames cared what people back in the U.S. thought. Other than that, their plan worked pretty well. And I have to admit I admire lovely Gail single-handedly digging that deep grave.

Letters page: Damon Runyon.

Say, you don't suppose O.J. read "In the Groove" before...Nah – couldn't be! Could it??

Although "Blood Brothers" prefigures Peter Benchley's "Jaws" by two decades, it carries the same visceral wallop. Say, you don't suppose Benchley read this before...?

Bob Gorby Camarillo, CA

As any farmboy can tell you (ask our anonymous editor), digging a hole is no cinch. Which is why he considers Hitchcock's THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY a fantasy rather than a comedy or a thriller!

Damon Runyon.

Re, a letter by Bill Thomason in CRIME 21 re, my letter in CRIME 12 in which I said ECs are awful, art is awful, stories are stupid, outrageous, moronic, idiotic, etc etc. Just the opposite!

As an aged EC FanAddict I like to sprinkle some sublime caustic lampoons around as well as OW, CK and VK. For those who don't know, a lampoon is defined as a satire, usually malicious, abusive, ridiculous and absurd all in a darkly humorous sense and at the same time invoking a paradoxial compliment. In short, don't take it seriously. Pshaw

As H. Kurtzman wrote in early MAD, "Only an idiot or moron would buy this trash-so buy it." Was I politically incorrect? "GOOD LORD" (Oops, Can I say that?).

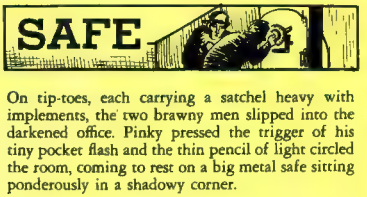
Excuse me now, The OW is fixing some bloody Marys and wants to discuss the subject of "Are ECs garbage, or what?" She recently bought the Moana Leeze and wants to know where to stick it. Gotta go, CK just walked in.

Your faithful subscriber (All 9),

Ron Silay North Riverside, IL

The (anonymous) idiot editor agrees with your EC Pshawvinisms – no problem! Does OW know that Moana was painted on a panel?

NEXT ISSUE



On tip-toes, each carrying a satchel heavy with implements, the two brawny men slipped into the darkened office. Pinky pressed the trigger of his tiny pocket flash and the thin pencil of light circled the room, coming to rest on a big metal safe sitting ponderously in a shadowy corner.

"There she is," Spec whispered exultantly, depositing his bag on the floor. "It's almost 4 o'clock . . . let's knock this bimbo off before it gets light!" desk. "We'll do such a neat job they won't know for hours that this can's been jimmied!" he whispered. "No busted stuff . . . no fingerprints!" Then he transferred a battered cardboard folder and a feathery lady's hat from the top of the safe to the nearby desk. "After this caper's finished," he confided, "we move this junk back to the safe . . . clean up the joint so it looks like no one's been here . . . then we go pffffft with the 5 grand I know they got stashed away for deposit tomorrow!"

At 8 o'clock, when light was already beginning to probe through the venetian blinds, Spec groaned and tossed aside the sledge-hammer he had been using for the past hour. "N-No use," he gasped wearily.

"I . . . I can't understand it!" Pinky muttered, wiping sweat from his forehead with a shaky hand. "We been rassling with this safe for 4 hours . . . we've used hammers, chisels, drills, torches . . . and still it's no soap! There's 5 G's in that box, and we can't budge the door! Let's give it one more whirl before . . ."

A key scraped in a lock at that moment. "Quick!" Pinky grunted, frantically throwing his tools into his valise. "Grab that junk I dumped on the desk and put it back on top of the safe! T-There's a screen here we can duck behind . . ."

Less than a minute later, peering out of their hiding place, Pinky and Spec saw the office door open and a slim girl entered, followed by three armed bank guards. They moved quickly across the room to the safe. Audibly grinding her chewing gum, the girl pushed aside the ash tray and the feathery hat atop the metal vault, and picked up the battered cardboard folder. She peered inside and smiled. "It's safe and sound," she giggled.

The guards exchanged a bewildered glance. "The *cash,*" one of them asked, "ain't it kept in 'at safe?"

"Naw!" the slim girl answered, popping her chewing gum loudly. "That safe's no good at all!" "That thing's been jammed for months. The company that manufactured it sent a specialist . . . a reg'lar safe-cracker he was! He worked for a full week . . . couldn't budge the door!"

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Also available this month are HAUNT and FRONTLINE COMBAT. Watch for CRYPT, PANIC and the first issue of PIRACY next month Don't forget VAULT, TWO-FISTED and the first issue of VALOR, coming soon! Get them at your local comic book shop or SUBSCRIBE (see our ad in this comic)!

BACK ISSUES: CRYPT #1, sold out; FRONT #1-4, $2 each; all others up thru issue #3, $1.50 each; CRYPT, W SCI & SHOCK #4-16, and VAULT, W FAN, 2FIST, HAUNT and CRIME #4-15, $2 each. All others, $2.50 each (Latest issues: CRYPT, W SCI, VAULT, W FAN, 2FIST, HAUNT and CRIME are up to 22, FRONT to 11 and PANIC to 4.).

Don't forget the entire 11-issue run of WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY/INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION (#1-3, $1.50 each; #4-11, $2 each) and the 18 issues of SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES (#1-3, $1.50 each; #4-15, $2.00 each; #16-18, $2.50 each)!

Add $5 per order ($10 outside US) for S&H.

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THIS COMIC REPRINTS
CRIME SUSPENSTORIES #22 (APR/MAY 1954)

COVER by Johnny Craig	
"In Each and Every Package"	Reed Crandall
"Monotony"	Bernie Krigstein
"Cinder Block"	Jack Kamen
"Sight Unseen"	Joe Orlando

We welcome letters of comment. We cannot promise to acknowledge, publish or answer letters. We edit for clarity, accuracy and length. We automatically withhold street address and zip code unless you clearly state you wish them published. We attempt to acknowledge publication of letters, to do so we need your address on the individual letter

Pardon my watery stare, but I had my eyes peeled for some more great art to share with my FanAddict friends, and Todd Vickers, Gardena, CA, provided it. And I'm glad he did, my eyes were getting chapped! Thanks, old chap (16 years young), for heading up my lineup in THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S PAGE OF. . .

FINE ARTS #61

Dear Crippie,

Here I am, back with another poem. I don't know why it is but I find you so inspirational. Just one look at you and my head starts spinning, my stomach leaps and stuff just spews out of me. The next thing I know I'm throwing up poetry. Do you have the same effect on others? Sincerely,

Wendy Gunther — Colchester, VT

I've run your poem below, and ordered a round of bromos for the house (and I see you've drawn the house!). –CK

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Spectral fingers touch my face,
Leaving trails of tattered lace.
A half-remembered children's song,
Floats in the air and then is gone.

Beneath grim portraits, glaring eyes,
Forbidden shadows start to rise.
Dread shapes untwine from peeling walls,
And glide along the shrouded halls,
Where weeping figures crouch and pray,
Near shuttered rooms that bar their way.

And I don't know how I came here,
Who whispers softly in my ear,
'This house shall never set you free,
Throughout your cursed eternity.'

After his show biz success, the HBO 'Cryptkeeper' has evidently joined the suits in the business world, and this candid cartoon by Andrew Abis, Germantown, TN, proves it. –CK

Send your contribs (not returnable, not too long, not too big, legible doublespaced text &/or bold black art. Warning...we edit) to:

THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S
PAGE OF FINE ARTS
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CINDER BLOCK

CONRAD GUIDED HIS FLASHY CREAM-COLORED CADILLAC INTO THE DARK DESERTED STREET, PULLED UP AT THE CURB, AND CUT THE IGNITION SWITCH. THE POWERFUL ENGINE DIED AND THE SILENCE CLOSED IN THICK AND OPPRESSIVE. CONRAD REACHED FOR A CIGARETTE, LIT UP, AND LOOKED AT HIS WATCH. EVERYTHING WAS RIGHT ON SCHEDULE. HE ROLLED UP THE WINDOW BESIDE HIM, PRESSED DOWN THE LATCH LOCKING THE DOOR, SLID ACROSS THE SEAT, AND STEPPED OUT INTO THE CHILL MIDNIGHT AIR. ABOVE, THE STARS PINPOINTED THE WINTER NIGHT SKY LIKE FAR-AWAY TINY DIAMONDS ON A JEWLER'S BLACK-VELVET SHOW-CARD. THE CAR DOOR SWUNG SHUT BEHIND HIM, ECHOING UP THE EMPTY STREET. HE TURNED AND, INSERTING THE KEY, LOCKED IT...

CAN'T TAKE *CHANCES!* *THIS* BUGGY STANDS OUT LIKE A *SORE THUMB*. IT'S *SAFER* FOR ME TO PARK A FEW BLOCKS FROM THE APARTMENT HOUSE LIKE THIS.

AFTER A FINAL INSPECTION TO MAKE SURE THAT THE WINDOWS WERE ALL SHUT AND THE CAR LOCKED UP SECURELY, CONRAD STARTED OFF DOWN THE DIMLY LIT STREET. HE WALKED BRISKLY, HIS CLATTERING FOOTSTEPS REVERBERATING OFF THE SLEEPING STONE FACES OF THE BUILDINGS. AT THE CORNER, HE TURNED RIGHT. THE NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGED AS HE MOVED ALONG. THE EMPTY LOFT BUILDINGS GAVE WAY TO STORES, THEN BROWNSTONES, THEN, FINALLY, TO PATRICIA'S LUXURIOUS APARTMENT BUILDING...

PERFECT! THE *DOOR-MAN'S* GONE OFF TO GRAB HIS *USUAL MIDNIGHT SNACK!* JUST AS WE *PLANNED*...

CONRAD STEPPED INTO THE FOYER. HE SLIPPED THE KEY PATRICIA HAD GIVEN HIM INTO THE FRONT DOOR LOCK AND LET HIMSELF INTO THE LOBBY..

NO ONE AROUND! GOOD! NOW... THE ELEVATOR...

THE ELEVATOR WAS UP ON EIGHT. CONRAD PRESSED THE BUTTON AND SOMEWHERE, A MOTOR BEGAN TO HUM. AFTER A WHILE, THE ELEVATOR DOOR SLID OPEN AND HE STEPPED INSIDE...

'P'... FOR PENTHOUSE!

P
10
9

CONRAD PUSHED THE FLOOR INDICATOR AND THE ELEVATOR DOOR SLID SHUT. HE WHISTLED SOFTLY AS HE WAS WHIRLED UPWARD THROUGH THE STEEL THROAT OF THE BUILDING...

THE HUMMING STOPPED. THE ELEVATOR CAME TO REST. THE DOOR SLID OPEN, AND CONRAD STEPPED OUT INTO A LUSH CARPETED HALLWAY WITH A LONE DOOR MARKED 'P'...

HE RAPPED SOFTLY. THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN, PATRICIA STOOD THERE, DRESSED IN A SOFT NEGLIGEE THAT CLUNG TO HER CURVACIOUS FIGURE LIKE A PINK FILM...

HELLO, PAT BABY.

OH, CONNIE! I'M *SCARED!*

HE TOOK HER TREMBLING BODY IN HIS ARMS AND KISSED HER FULL RED QUIVERING LIPS. SHE SIGHED AND HELD HIM, PRESSING CLOSE...

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE *ALL RIGHT*, HONEY! DID YOU... DID YOU *GIVE* IT TO HIM? THE *STUFF?*

HE... HE'S *IN HIS ROOM... OUT LIKE A LIGHT!*

THAT'S *PRETTY POTENT STUFF*. AN *ATOM BOMB* CAN GO OFF NOW AND HE WON'T HEAR IT...

I *KNOW*. AFTER I *GAVE* IT TO HIM, HE STARTED TO GET *SLEEPY!* HE TOLD ME TO GO TO MY ROOM AS *USUAL*, BUT THEN HE *DOZED OFF* BEFORE HE COULD COME AND *LOCK ME IN!*

SHE LED HIM INTO HER HUSBAND'S BEDROOM...

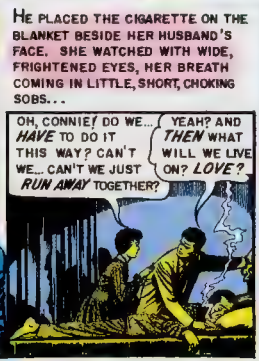
SEE? HE'S GOT THE *KEY* TO MY BEDROOM DOOR IN HIS *HAND!* I'LL *GET* IT...

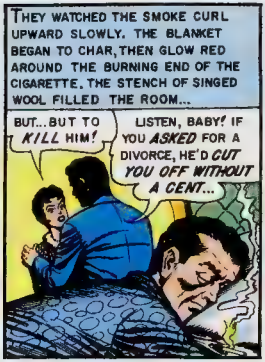
DON'T *TOUCH* IT! WE *NEED* HIS *FINGERPRINTS* ON IT!

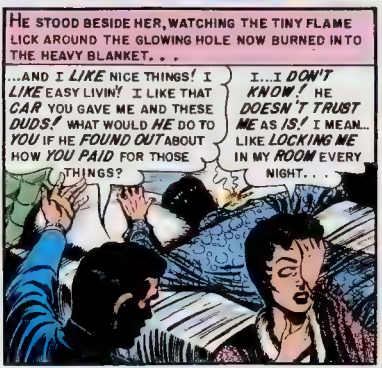
CONRAD WHIPPED OUT HIS HANDKERCHIEF AND CAREFULLY PRIED THE KEY FROM HER HUSBAND'S HANDS WITH IT. THEN HE ROLLED IT UP AND SLIPPED IT INTO HIS POCKET...
ALL RIGHT! NOW, GIVE ME ONE OF HIS CIGARETTES...
H...HERE!

SHE HELD OUT A CIGARETTE SHE'D TAKEN FROM THE BOX ON THE NIGHT TABLE. HE TOOK IT AND PLACED IT BETWEEN HIS LIPS. SHE STRUCK A MATCH. THE FLAME LICKED AT THE CIGARETTE-END, GLOWING IT CHERRY-RED...
YOU SAY HE ALWAYS SMOKES IN BED?
LORD, YES! HE'S BURNED HOLES IN MORE BLANKETS AND PILLOW CASES. WHY, THE INSURANCE COMPANY CANCELLED OUR POLICY BECAUSE WE MADE TOO MANY CLAIMS...

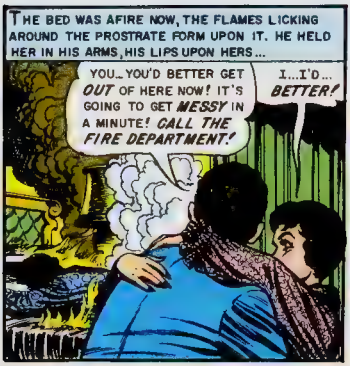
CONRAD PUFFED HARD ON THE CIGARETTE, PULLING THE ORANGE GLOW DOWN THE WHITE SHAFT...
GOOD! THAT'S WHAT WE WANT IT TO LOOK LIKE! LIKE THE FIRE STARTED FROM SMOKING IN BED! THERE! THAT OUGHT TO DO IT! NOW...

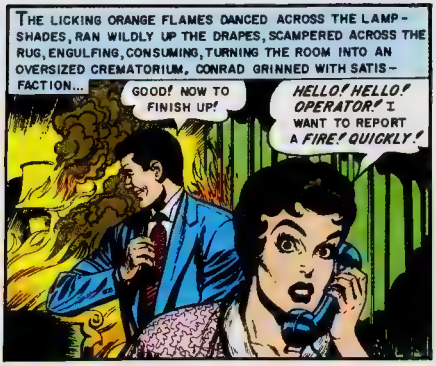

HE PLACED THE CIGARETTE ON THE BLANKET BESIDE HER HUSBAND'S FACE. SHE WATCHED WITH WIDE, FRIGHTENED EYES, HER BREATH COMING IN LITTLE, SHORT, CHOKING SOBS...
OH, CONNIE! DO WE... HAVE TO DO IT THIS WAY? CAN'T WE... CAN'T WE JUST RUN AWAY TOGETHER?
YEAH? AND THEN WHAT WILL WE LIVE ON? LOVE?

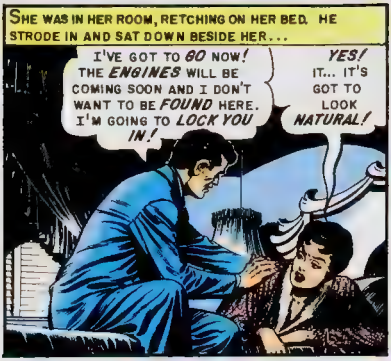

THEY WATCHED THE SMOKE CURL UPWARD SLOWLY. THE BLANKET BEGAN TO CHAR, THEN GLOW RED AROUND THE BURNING END OF THE CIGARETTE. THE STENCH OF SINGED WOOL FILLED THE ROOM...
BUT... BUT TO KILL HIM!
LISTEN, BABY! IF YOU ASKED FOR A DIVORCE, HE'D CUT YOU OFF WITHOUT A CENT...


HE STOOD BESIDE HER, WATCHING THE TINY FLAME LICK AROUND THE GLOWING HOLE NOW BURNED INTO THE HEAVY BLANKET. . .
...AND I LIKE NICE THINGS! I LIKE EASY LIVIN'! I LIKE THAT CAR YOU GAVE ME AND THESE DUDS! WHAT WOULD HE DO TO YOU IF HE FOUND OUT ABOUT HOW YOU PAID FOR THOSE THINGS?
I...I DON'T KNOW! HE DOESN'T TRUST ME AS IS! I MEAN... LIKE LOCKING ME IN MY ROOM EVERY NIGHT...

GO AHEAD! FEEL SORRY FOR HIM NOW! FORGET ABOUT HOW HE TREATS YOU. FORGET ABOUT ME. FORGET ABOUT HOW MUCH I WANT YOU... HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU. FEEL SORRY FOR HIM!
I CAN'T HELP IT! I... SOB... I... OH, CONNIE! KISS ME!

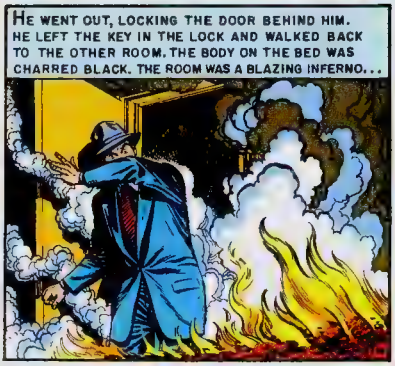

THE BED WAS AFIRE NOW, THE FLAMES LICKING AROUND THE PROSTRATE FORM UPON IT. HE HELD HER IN HIS ARMS, HIS LIPS UPON HERS...
YOU...YOU'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE NOW! IT'S GOING TO GET MESSY IN A MINUTE! CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT!
I...I'D... BETTER!


THE LICKING ORANGE FLAMES DANCED ACROSS THE LAMP-SHADES, RAN WILDLY UP THE DRAPES, SCAMPERED ACROSS THE RUG, ENGULFING, CONSUMING, TURNING THE ROOM INTO AN OVERSIZED CREMATORIUM, CONRAD GRINNED WITH SATISFACTION...
GOOD! NOW TO FINISH UP!
HELLO! HELLO! OPERATOR! I WANT TO REPORT A FIRE! QUICKLY!


SHE WAS IN HER ROOM, RETCHING ON HER BED. HE STRODE IN AND SAT DOWN BESIDE HER...
I'VE GOT TO GO NOW! THE ENGINES WILL BE COMING SOON AND I DON'T WANT TO BE FOUND HERE. I'M GOING TO LOCK YOU IN!
YES! IT... IT'S GOT TO LOOK NATURAL!

HE STOOD UP. SHE LOOKED UP AT HIM FROM HER SPRAWLED POSITION ON THE BED...
IS HE... IS HE DEAD YET?
PROBABLY! IF HE'S NOT NOW... HE WILL BE... SHORTLY!

HE PULLED THE HANDKERCHIEF WITH THE WRAPPED KEY FROM HIS POCKET, UNROLLED IT, AND SLIPPED IT INTO THE BEDROOM DOOR LOCK...
DON'T WORRY, BABY! SOME BIG HANDSOME FIREMAN WILL BE CHOPPING DOWN THIS DOOR BEFORE THE FLAMES EVEN GET NEAR YOU...
I...I HOPE SO, CONNIE...


HE WENT OUT, LOCKING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM. HE LEFT THE KEY IN THE LOCK AND WALKED BACK TO THE OTHER ROOM. THE BODY ON THE BED WAS CHARRED BLACK. THE ROOM WAS A BLAZING INFERNO...

ON THE WAY DOWN IN THE ELEVATOR, HE WENT OVER THE WHOLE THING IN HIS MIND. THE MAID WOULD TESTIFY THAT PAT'S HUSBAND ALWAYS LOCKED HER IN HER ROOM AT NIGHT...
HE WAS OLDER THAN SHE... AND EXTREMELY JEALOUS... WHY I OFTEN CAME IN THE MORNING AND LET HER OUT...
AND THE INSURANCE COMPANY WOULD HELP ALONG WITH THEIR STATEMENT...
THE MAN REFUSED TO TAKE WARNING! HE REPEATEDLY SMOKED IN BED. WE PAID THE FIRST FEW CLAIMS, BUT AFTER A WHILE WE JUST CANCELLED THE POLICY...
AND PAT WOULD GO INTO HER ACT...
...I SMELLED THE SMOKE! I WANTED TO...SOB...GO TO HIM... AWAKEN HIM...BUT...SOB...HE'D LOCKED ME IN! I SCREAMED... BUT HE DIDN'T HEAR ME! I POUNDED ON THE DOOR. AND THEN, THE FIREMEN CAME AND...SOB... IT WAS TOO LATE...
AND THEN THEY'D BE FREE...FREE TO MARRY... FREE TO GO WHEREVER THEY WANTED...FREE TO SPEND THE FORTUNE THEY'D INHERITED...
HAPPY, BABY?
MMMMMMM...
HE'D WORKED IT OUT SO CAREFULLY. THE TIMING WAS PERFECT. THE ELEVATOR DOOR SLID OPEN. HE STEPPED OUT. THE DOORMAN HAD STILL NOT RETURNED. HE HURRIED ACROSS THE LOBBY AND OUT OF THE BUILDING. HE LISTENED FOR A MOMENT...
C'MON, YOU FIRE ENGINES!
HE COULD HEAR THE SIREN SCREAMING...FAR OFF...
AH! RIGHT ON SCHEDULE!
HE LOOKED UP. HE COULD SEE SMOKE POURING FROM THE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT...FLAMES LICKING AT THE WINDOW OF PAT'S HUSBAND'S ROOM...
DON'T WORRY, BABY! THEY'LL BE HERE IN A MINUTE!

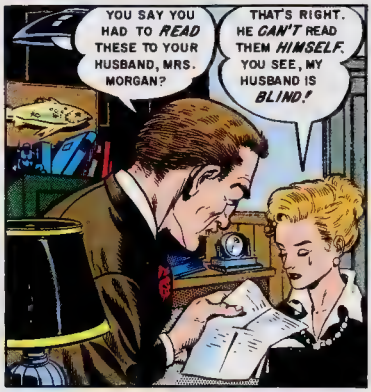
THE SIREN WAILED, FAR AWAY, LIKE A CRYING CHILD... LOST AMONG THE MAN-MADE CANYONS. BUT NO FIRE ENGINE APPEARED...
BLAST YOU! WHERE ARE YOU?
THE SECONDS TICKED OFF. THE MINUTES CRAWLED BY. ABOVE, IN THE NIGHT SKY, A SHRIEK ECHOED UP TO THE STARS...
PAT! MY GOD!
HELP ME! SOMEONE!
SHE STOOD AT THE WINDOW, THE GLOW BEHIND HER SILHOUETTING HER LOVELY BODY...
LOOK! A WOMAN! SHE'S GOING TO JUMP!
NO! NO!
HE SCREAMED UP AT HER...
PAT! NO! DON'T JUMP! LISTEN! HEAR THEM? THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY! THEY'LL BE HERE ANY MINUTE! WAIT! WAIT! DON'T JUMP!
ANOTHER MINUTE CRAWLED PAST. THE SIREN CONTINUED, NOT DRAWING CLOSE... NOT COMING NEAR...
OH, LORD! COME! COME! EEEEEE!
THE SHRIEK VIBRATED INTO THE NIGHT AGAIN! THIS TIME IT WAS A SHRIEK OF PAIN... A SHRIEK OF FEAR AND TERROR...
SHE'S JUMPING! THAT'S ELEVEN FLOORS UP!
PAT! NO! MY GOD!
HE RAN TOWARD HER FALLING BODY... NOT THINKING... NOT REASONING... WANTING ONLY TO STOP HER FALL... PROTECT HER FROM THE CRUSHING CONCRETE TOWARD WHICH SHE HURTLED...
COME BACK, YOU FOOL! YOU CAN'T CATCH HER! SHE'LL KILL YOU, TOO... PAT!
...THE IMPACT! BODY SLAMMING AGAINST BODY... SNAPPING BONE... RUPTURING BLOOD VESSELS... THE PAIN... THE HORRIBLE PAIN. PAT WAS DEAD. CONRAD LAY WITH A BROKEN SPINE, SINKING INTO OBLIVION AFTER HER. THE FIRE ENGINE FINALLY SCREECHED UP NEARBY...
HEY! WHAT KEPT YOU GUYS?
SOME DARN FOOL LEFT HIS SNAZZY CREAM-COLORED CADILLAC PARKED SQUARE IN FRONT OF THE FIRE HOUSE. COULDN'T GET OUT! LOCKED UP TIGHTER'N A DRUM! HAD TO SMASH THE WINDOWS AND PUSH 'ER, WOULD HAVE BEEN HERE FIVE MINUTES AGO...
THE END

SIGHT UNSEEN

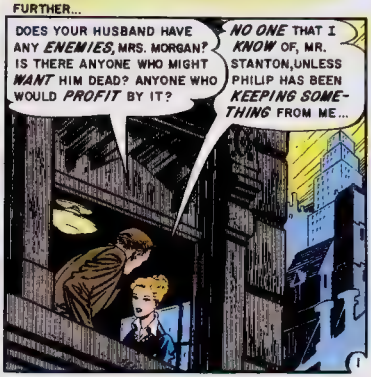
My name is *BERT STANTON*. I keep a .45 automatic in a holster strapped under my left arm and a license for it tucked away in my wallet. There's another card in my wallet. It reads the same as the door to my crummy office downtown. 'Private Investigator.' Yeah, I'm a *SHAMUS*... a *PRIVATE EYE*. Up till last month, I used to read those 'private eye' pocket books that glut the newsstands and laugh myself silly over them. They were all the same. But nothing like what happened to the guys in those books ever happened to me. Up until last month, that is. Early one afternoon, this dame comes in, all red-eyed, and nervous, and shaking like a leaf...

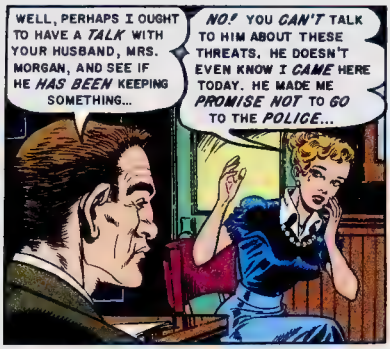
ALL RIGHT, MRS. MORGAN. JUST *CALM DOWN* AND TELL ME WHY YOU CAME TO *SEE* ME.
IT'S ABOUT *THESE*, MR. STANTON. MY HUSBAND HAS BEEN *RECEIVING* THEM *REGULARLY*. THEY'RE *THREATS ON HIS LIFE*. I...I'VE...SOB...HAD TO *READ EVERY* ONE OF THEM *TO* HIM...
Jon Gilbert

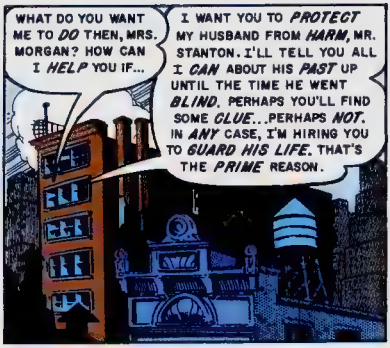
I took the neatly typewritten notes and scanned them hastily. They were *THREATS*, all right! The guy who had *RECEIVED* them was sure in a *PACK OF TROUBLE* with somebody who was *OUT* for his *SCALP*...

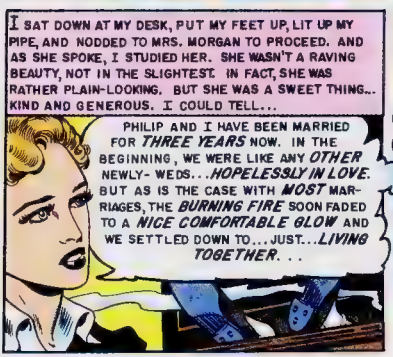


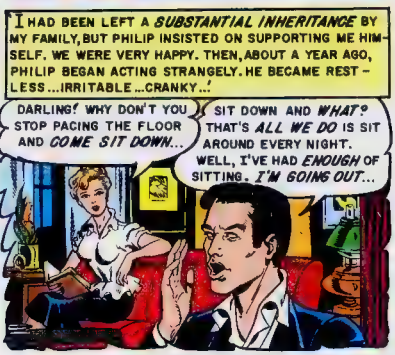
THREATS to a *BLIND GUY*. Nice people live in this world, eh? I questioned Mrs. Morgan further...


DOES YOUR HUSBAND HAVE ANY *ENEMIES*, MRS. MORGAN? IS THERE ANYONE WHO MIGHT *WANT* HIM DEAD? ANYONE WHO WOULD *PROFIT* BY IT?
NO ONE THAT I *KNOW* OF, MR. STANTON, UNLESS PHILIP HAS BEEN *KEEPING SOMETHING* FROM ME...


WELL, PERHAPS I OUGHT TO HAVE A TALK WITH YOUR HUSBAND, MRS. MORGAN, AND SEE IF HE HAS BEEN KEEPING SOMETHING...
NO! YOU CAN'T TALK TO HIM ABOUT THESE THREATS. HE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW I CAME HERE TODAY. HE MADE ME PROMISE NOT TO GO TO THE POLICE...


WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO THEN, MRS. MORGAN? HOW CAN I HELP YOU IF...
I WANT YOU TO PROTECT MY HUSBAND FROM HARM, MR. STANTON. I'LL TELL YOU ALL I CAN ABOUT HIS PAST UP UNTIL THE TIME HE WENT BLIND. PERHAPS YOU'LL FIND SOME CLUE...PERHAPS NOT. IN ANY CASE, I'M HIRING YOU TO GUARD HIS LIFE. THAT'S THE PRIME REASON.


I SAT DOWN AT MY DESK, PUT MY FEET UP, LIT UP MY PIPE, AND NODDED TO MRS. MORGAN TO PROCEED. AND AS SHE SPOKE, I STUDIED HER. SHE WASN'T A RAVING BEAUTY, NOT IN THE SLIGHTEST. IN FACT, SHE WAS RATHER PLAIN-LOOKING. BUT SHE WAS A SWEET THING... KIND AND GENEROUS. I COULD TELL...
PHILIP AND I HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR THREE YEARS NOW. IN THE BEGINNING, WE WERE LIKE ANY OTHER NEWLY-WEDS...HOPELESSLY IN LOVE. BUT AS IS THE CASE WITH MOST MARRIAGES, THE BURNING FIRE SOON FADED TO A NICE COMFORTABLE GLOW AND WE SETTLED DOWN TO...JUST...LIVING TOGETHER...


I HAD BEEN LEFT A SUBSTANTIAL INHERITANCE BY MY FAMILY, BUT PHILIP INSISTED ON SUPPORTING ME HIMSELF. WE WERE VERY HAPPY. THEN, ABOUT A YEAR AGO, PHILIP BEGAN ACTING STRANGELY. HE BECAME RESTLESS...IRRITABLE...CRANKY...
DARLING! WHY DON'T YOU STOP PACING THE FLOOR AND COME SIT DOWN...
SIT DOWN AND WHAT? THAT'S ALL WE DO IS SIT AROUND EVERY NIGHT. WELL, I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF SITTING. I'M GOING OUT...

'PHILIP HADN'T BEEN DOING WELL FINANCIALLY. HE STARTED GOING OUT EVENINGS, ALONE...AND I LET HIM. I FELT THAT WHATEVER WAS WRONG, A COUPLE OF NIGHTS OUT A WEEK WITH THE BOYS WOULD HELP...'
GOING OUT AGAIN, TONIGHT, DEAR?
THAT'S RIGHT! ANY OBJECTION?

'ONE NIGHT, PHILIP CAME HOME FROM ONE OF HIS "NIGHTS OUT" AND DEMANDED...'
YOU HEARD ME! I WANT YOU TO GIVE ME A DIVORCE!
I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND, PHILIP! WHY? WHY?

WE'RE THROUGH, ELLY. THERE'S NO USE GOING ON LIKE THIS. I'M A FINANCIAL FAILURE. WE LIVE LIKE PIGS. WHY DON'T WE CALL THE WHOLE THING OFF?
I'VE GOT A VERY GOOD REASON, DARLING! I STILL LOVE YOU!

'I REFUSED TO EVEN CONSIDER PHILIP'S PLEAS FOR A DIVORCE. I FELT THAT HE DIDN'T MEAN HALF THE THINGS HE WAS SAYING...'

LOOK, ELLY! YOU'RE INDEPENDENTLY WEALTHY! YOU COULD START ALL OVER... BEGIN A NEW LIFE... WHILE YOU'RE STILL YOUNG...

I DON'T WANT A NEW LIFE, PHIL. I WANT THIS ONE... WITH YOU!

'PHIL TRIED TO CONVINCE ME ABOUT A DIVORCE SEVERAL MORE TIMES BUT I WAS STUBBORN. THEN, ONE MORNING, I WAS AWAKENED BY...'

ELLY! ELLY! TURN ON THE LIGHTS!

PHIL! WHAT IS IT? DARLING!

TURN ON THE LIGHTS, ELLY! IT'S SO DARK!

PHIL! IT'S MORNING! THE SUN IS SHINING! WAIT! I'LL PULL UP THE SHADES!

'YES, THE SUN WAS SHINING, ALL RIGHT. THE LIGHT SUDDENLY DAWNED ON ME AS I LOOKED AT MY HUSBAND SITTING UP IN BED WITH THOSE COLD, STARING EYES AND THAT LOOK OF HORROR ON HIS FACE...

ELLY! I CAN'T SEE! MY EYES ARE OPEN, BUT I CAN'T SEE! ELLY! I'M BLIND!

PHIL... SOB... PHIL...

'I SAT BESIDE HIM, CRADLING HIS HEAD IN MY ARMS, STROKING HIS SOFT BLACK HAIR, AND SOBBING...'

YOU... YOU KNEW, DIDN'T YOU, PHILIP? YOU KNEW YOU WERE GOING BLIND! THAT'S WHY YOU WANTED ME TO DIVORCE YOU, ISN'T IT? YOU WANTED TO SPARE ME. YOU WANTED TO... SOB... SOB...

I... I DIDN'T WANT YOU TIED DOWN, ELLY! I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO BE CHAINED TO A BLIND MAN! I...

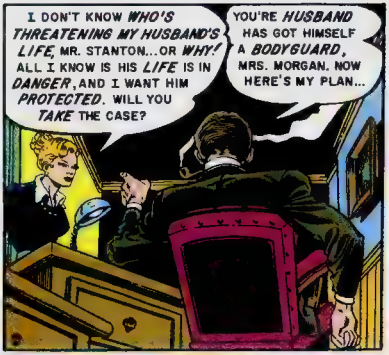
ELEANOR MORGAN SHRUGGED. SHE LOOKED AT ME THROUGH TEAR-FILLED EYES...

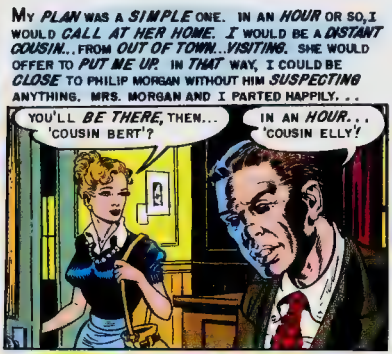
THAT'S IT, MR. STANTON. NATURALLY, NOW THAT PHILIP IS BLIND, WE ARE LIVING ON MY INHERITANCE.

WHAT ABOUT THESE NOTES, MRS. MORGAN?

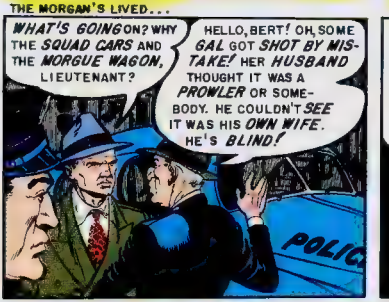
THEY STARTED COMING ABOUT A MONTH AGO. PHILIP DENIES KNOWING WHO IS SENDING THEM. HE SAYS IT'S THE WORK OF A CRANK. HE'S MADE LIGHT OF THEM TO ME, BUT I HAPPEN TO KNOW HE'S WORRIED. IN FACT, JUST YESTERDAY, A PACKAGE ARRIVED FROM A SPORTING GOODS STORE. IT WAS ADDRESSED TO PHILIP. I OPENED IT. IT WAS A RIFLE... AND A BOX OF SHELLS...

...AND A BLIND MAN HAS LITTLE USE FOR A RIFLE EXCEPT AS A WEAPON TO DEFEND HIMSELF WITH, EH, MRS. MORGAN?

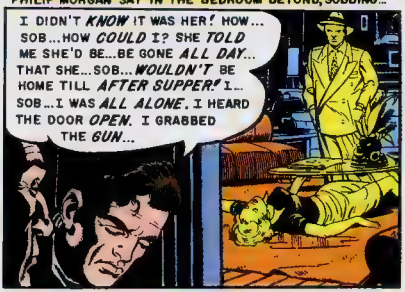

I DON'T KNOW *WHO'S THREATENING MY HUSBAND'S LIFE*, MR. STANTON...OR *WHY!* ALL I KNOW IS HIS *LIFE* IS IN *DANGER*, AND I WANT HIM *PROTECTED*. WILL YOU *TAKE* THE CASE?
YOU'RE *HUSBAND* HAS GOT HIMSELF A *BODYGUARD*, MRS. MORGAN. NOW HERE'S MY PLAN...


MY *PLAN* WAS A *SIMPLE* ONE. IN AN *HOUR* OR SO, I WOULD *CALL AT HER HOME*. I WOULD BE A *DISTANT COUSIN*...FROM *OUT OF TOWN*...*VISITING*. SHE WOULD OFFER TO *PUT ME UP*. IN *THAT* WAY, I COULD BE *CLOSE* TO PHILIP MORGAN WITHOUT HIM *SUSPECTING* ANYTHING. MRS. MORGAN AND I PARTED HAPPILY...
YOU'LL *BE THERE*, THEN... 'COUSIN BERT'?
IN AN *HOUR*... 'COUSIN ELLY!'

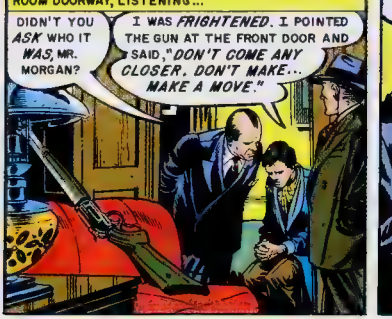
THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I SAW ELEANOR MORGAN ALIVE. WHEN I GOT TO THE APARTMENT HOUSE WHERE THE MORGAN'S LIVED...

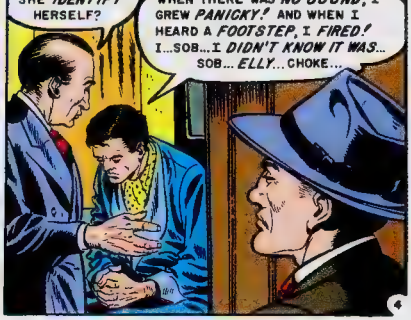

WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY THE *SQUAD CARS* AND THE *MORGUE WAGON*, LIEUTENANT?
HELLO, BERT! OH, SOME *GAL* GOT *SHOT BY MISTAKE!* HER *HUSBAND* THOUGHT IT WAS A *PROWLER* OR SOMEBODY. HE COULDN'T *SEE* IT WAS HIS *OWN WIFE*. HE'S *BLIND!*
POLIC

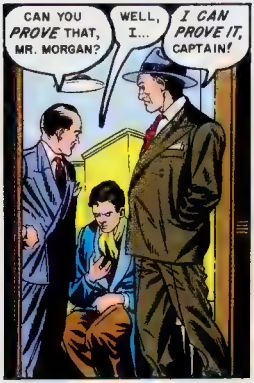
ELEANOR MORGAN LAY IN A POOL OF BLOOD ON THE LIVING ROOM RUG JUST INSIDE THE APARTMENT DOOR. PHILIP MORGAN SAT IN THE BEDROOM BEYOND, SOBBING...


I DIDN'T *KNOW* IT WAS HER! HOW... SOB...HOW *COULD* I? SHE *TOLD* ME SHE'D BE...BE GONE *ALL DAY*... THAT SHE...SOB...*WOULDN'T* BE HOME TILL *AFTER SUPPER!* I... SOB...I WAS *ALL ALONE*. I HEARD THE DOOR *OPEN*. I GRABBED THE *GUN*...

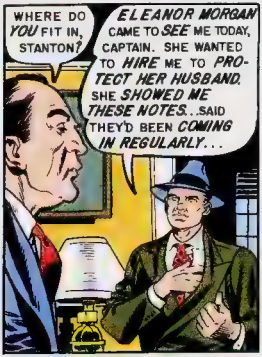
I MOVED THROUGH THE APARTMENT. THE RIFLE LAY ON THE COUCH WHERE PHILIP HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN SITTING WHEN HE'D FIRED. I STOOD IN THE BEDROOM DOORWAY, LISTENING...


DIDN'T YOU *ASK* WHO IT *WAS*, MR. MORGAN?
I WAS *FRIGHTENED*. I POINTED THE GUN AT THE FRONT DOOR AND SAID, "*DON'T COME ANY CLOSER. DON'T MAKE... MAKE A MOVE.*"


AND DIDN'T YOUR WIFE *SAY* ANYTHING? DIDN'T SHE *IDENTIFY* HERSELF?
NO! I ONLY HEARD A *GASP!* MAYBE...MAYBE SHE WAS *STUNNED*... *SHOCKED* AT SEEING THE *GUN!* WHEN THERE WAS *NO SOUND*, I GREW *PANICKY!* AND WHEN I HEARD A *FOOTSTEP*, I *FIRED!* I...SOB...I *DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS*... SOB... *ELLY*... CHOKE...

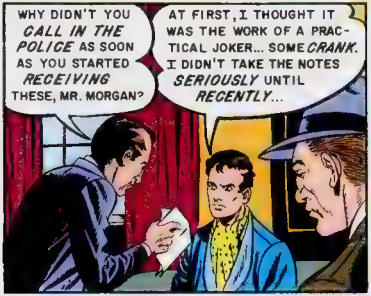


I STEPPED INTO THE BEDROOM...


WHERE DO YOU FIT IN, STANTON?
ELEANOR MORGAN CAME TO SEE ME TODAY, CAPTAIN. SHE WANTED TO HIRE ME TO PROTECT HER HUSBAND. SHE SHOWED ME THESE NOTES.. SAID THEY'D BEEN COMING IN REGULARLY...

THE CAPTAIN EXAMINED THE THREATENING LETTERS. HE LOOKED AT ME AND THEN HE LOOKED AT PHILIP MORGAN...

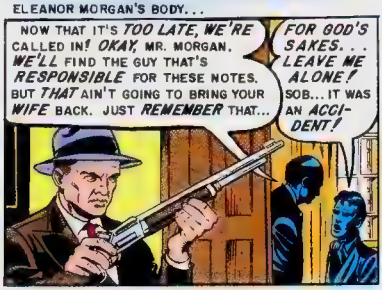
I WALKED OUT OF THE BEDROOM AND NOSED AROUND THE LIVING ROOM WHILE THE CAPTAIN LECTURED POOR MR. MORGAN...


WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL IN THE POLICE AS SOON AS YOU STARTED RECEIVING THESE, MR. MORGAN?
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT IT WAS THE WORK OF A PRACTICAL JOKER... SOME CRANK. I DIDN'T TAKE THE NOTES SERIOUSLY UNTIL RECENTLY...

YOU GUYS ARE ALL THE SAME. YOU'RE ALWAYS TOO SMART FOR YOUR OWN GOOD. YOU ALWAYS THINK YOU CAN HANDLE THESE THINGS YOURSELVES. JUST WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'RE FOR...
SOB... SOB...

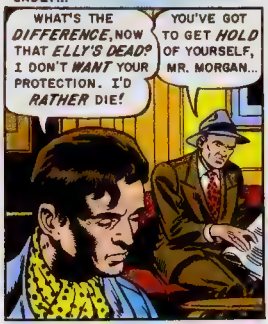
I PICKED UP THE RIFLE. IT WAS BRAND NEW. ITS WORKS SMELLED OF FRESH OIL. BUT ITS BARREL SMELLED OF GUNPOWDER AND ITS CHAMBER WAS EMPTY. IT HAD SENT FOUR 30-30 SLUGS INTO ELEANOR MORGAN'S BODY...

THE CAPTAIN STORMED OUT OF THE BEDROOM. HE CAME OVER TO ME. I PUT DOWN THE RIFLE AND PICKED UP THE EVENING NEWSPAPER FROM THE COFFEE TABLE...

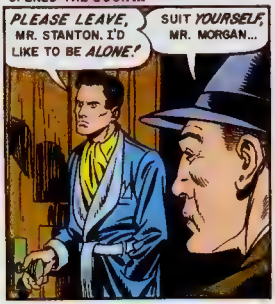

NOW THAT IT'S TOO LATE, WE'RE CALLED IN! OKAY, MR. MORGAN. WE'LL FIND THE GUY THAT'S RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE NOTES. BUT THAT AIN'T GOING TO BRING YOUR WIFE BACK. JUST REMEMBER THAT...
FOR GOD'S SAKES... LEAVE ME ALONE! SOB... IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!

THEY'D TAKEN OUT ELLY'S BODY AND CLEANED UP THE RUG, AND LEFT. PHILIP MORGAN AND I WERE ALONE. HE SHUFFLED INTO THE LIVING ROOM SLOWLY, HIS EYES STARING VACANTLY...

I FOLDED UP THE PAPER AND PUT IT DOWN AS MORGAN SHOOK HIS HEAD SADLY...

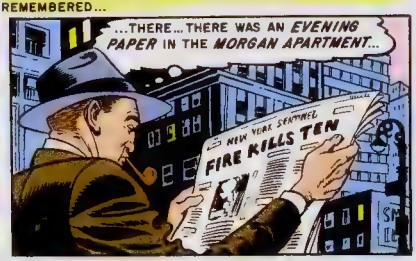

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE, NOW THAT ELLY'S DEAD? I DON'T WANT YOUR PROTECTION. I'D RATHER DIE!
YOU'VE GOT TO GET HOLD OF YOURSELF, MR. MORGAN...

HE CROSSED THE LIVING ROOM SLOWLY AND FELT AROUND UNTIL HE LOCATED THE FRONT DOOR KNOB. HE OPENED THE DOOR...

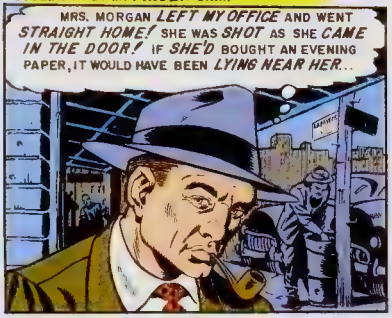


I WENT OUT INTO THE GATHERING TWILIGHT. I STARTED WALKING. SOMETHING WAS BOTHERING ME. I COULDN'T PUT MY FINGER ON IT...

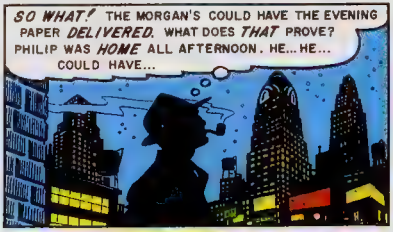
THE CITY WAS STILL UNAWARE OF THE TRAGEDY THAT HAD HAPPENED WITHIN ITS TOWERING WALLS. EVENING PAPERS ROLL OFF THE PRESSES IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON. MRS. MORGAN WAS KILLED IN THE LATE AFTERNOON. ONLY AN EXTRA EDITION WOULD CARRY THE STORY. AND THEN I REMEMBERED...



THAT'S RIGHT. I'D LOOKED THROUGH IT. WHAT WAS IT THAT WAS BOTHERING ME? WHAT WAS IT THAT I COULDN'T PUT MY FINGER ON...?

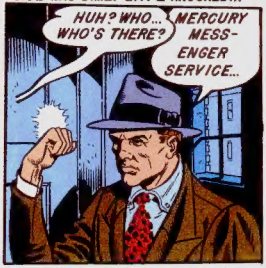

MRS. MORGAN LEFT MY OFFICE AND WENT STRAIGHT HOME! SHE WAS SHOT AS SHE CAME IN THE DOOR! IF SHE'D BOUGHT AN EVENING PAPER, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LYING NEAR HER...

I LOOKED UP AT THE SKY. THE STARS WERE COMING OUT. IT WAS GOING TO BE A NICE NIGHT AFTER ALL...


SO WHAT! THE MORGAN'S COULD HAVE THE EVENING PAPER DELIVERED. WHAT DOES THAT PROVE? PHILIP WAS HOME ALL AFTERNOON. HE...HE... COULD HAVE...

PHILIP WAS HOME ALL AFTERNOON...ALONE! HE COULD HAVE RECEIVED THE PAPER, TRUE! BUT THERE WAS THE OTHER THING...THE THING THAT HAD BEEN BOTHERING ME. I REMEMBERED IT NOW. I REMEMBERED WHAT I'D SEEN...

I STOPPED IN AT A STATIONERY STORE AND MADE A PURCHASE. LATE THAT NIGHT, WHEN I WAS SURE MORGAN HAD GONE TO BED, I RETURNED TO HIS APARTMENT. THE HALL OUTSIDE WAS DIMLY LIT. I KNOCKED...



I RAISED MY VOICE AN OCTAVE, DISGUISING IT AS BEST I COULD...

I SLIPPED THE ENVELOPE I'D PURCHASED UNDER THE DOOR...AND WAITED...

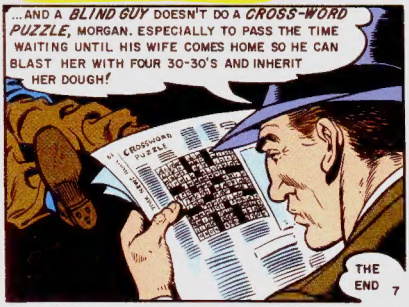
THE LIGHT CAME ON, BEAMING OUT FROM UNDER THE APARTMENT DOOR. I'D SEEN ENOUGH...

I KICKED OPEN THE DOOR. PHILIP STOOD THERE STUPIDLY, THE ENVELOPE IN HIS HAND. HE TRIED A LAST DITCH STAND. IT DIDN'T WORK...

WHO...WHO'S THERE? I... I CAN'T SEE...
CUT OUT THE BLIND ACT, MORGAN! IT DOESN'T GO! A BLIND MAN DOESN'T TURN ON LIGHTS TO FIND THINGS SLIPPED UNDER DOORS. YOU TYPED THOSE 'THREATENING LETTERS' TO YOURSELF, DIDN'T YOU?

HE MADE A DIVE FOR HIS RIFLE. MY .45 CAME OUT OF MY SHOULDER HOLSTER, BARKING FLAMING DEATH...

I PICKED UP THE EVENING PAPER I'D SCANNED THAT AFTERNOON. I TURNED TO THE PAGE THAT HAD GIVEN MORGAN AWAY. I SHOOK MY HEAD...


...AND A BLIND GUY DOESN'T DO A CROSS-WORD PUZZLE, MORGAN. ESPECIALLY TO PASS THE TIME WAITING UNTIL HIS WIFE COMES HOME SO HE CAN BLAST HER WITH FOUR 30-30'S AND INHERIT HER DOUGH!
CROSSWORD PUZZLE
THE END

HE CRUMBLED LIKE A DEFLATED BALLOON, SPITTING BLOOD UPON THE RECENTLY CLEANED RUG...

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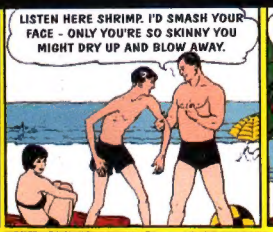
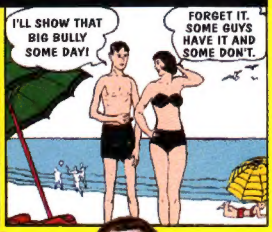
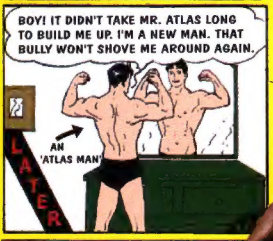
DON'T CUT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO - PHOTOCOPY OR YOUR OWN PAPER O

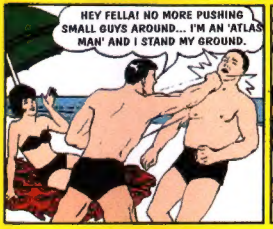
TIRED OF BEING PICKED ON?
NOBODY PICKS ON AN ATLAS MAN!

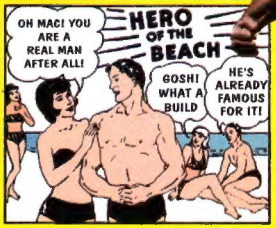


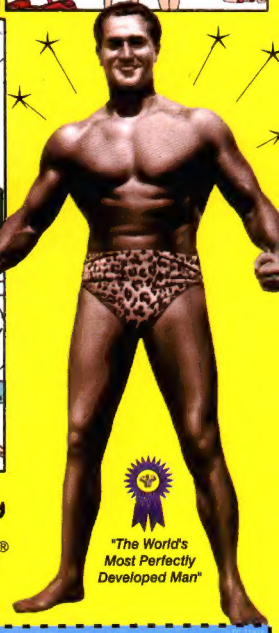


DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING CALLED NAMES. . . I'LL ORDER THE ATLAS' BODYBUILDING COURSE. . . HE'S HELPED MILLIONS OF GUYS JUST LIKE ME.
ATLAS AD POSED IN QUALITY LITERATURE









I WAS PICKED ON TOO - NOT ANYMORE!

That's right fellas, I understand how it feels to be **"picked on."** I was a skinny "97-pound weakling." I was so ashamed of my scrawny body that I dreaded being seen in a swim suit or going to the gym. The girls wouldn't look at me and the guys gave me no respect. That all changed for me, and I'll change it for you. I'll make you an **"Atlas Man."** I will build you a massive muscular body to impress the girls and stop the bullies! **You have my word on that!**

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